Lilith

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A Brave Flight from the Hasidic World

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and a Crop of New Activists

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What to Do with Grandma's Trousseau Lingerie

Breast Cancer in Our Genes
Trying to Keep Anxiety at Bay

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In the Garden of Eden, long before the eating of the apple, the Holy One created the first human beings—a man, Adam, and a woman, Lilith. Lilith said "We are equal because we are created from the same earth."

—from *The Alphabet of Ben Sira, 23a-b*

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From the Editor

It's chilly out now, at least here in the northern hemisphere, and thoughts turn to warm things—human relations (even pet relations) and, for me at least, food. Aside from the very concrete pleasures of greenmarket shopping and festive meals, I've had intellectual pleasures with food this season too, triggered by my participation in a highly entertaining and illuminating conference on historical Jewish food in Washington, D.C., which Lilith co-sponsored—"Are We What We Eat? American Jewish Foodways, 1654-2004."

There have always been interesting connections between Jewish women and food, but they are too rarely explored, except by comedians. So when Joan Nathan, perhaps the best-known Jewish food personality (and the instigator of this conference) convened our planning committee, I was determined that gender issues get onto the menu. In a session entitled "Gender and Jewish Food," I shared a few of the tantalizing connections that have interested us at Lilith over the years:

Who controls kashrut? Though it has been men who have codified and interpreted the laws of kashrut—which foods are acceptable to eat and which forbidden, how many hours to wait between eating a meat meal and one containing dairy, and so forth—women have been the ones to enact these laws in daily life. So, in whose hands does the real power lie? We've heard about women keeping kosher when no one else cared, and women, angry at their husbands, who circumvented these laws as a kind of insurrection (like the woman who traded everyday dishes with a neighbor and claimed to her husband that the unfamiliar china was a Passover set.) Kashrut observance opens a window on family politics and power in the kitchen.

> Food can be about power, politics & potent family connections.

What about the larger politics of food as business? Because women were often the ones shopping for the food as well as preparing it, they've been in the forefront of consumer activism—for example, the kosher meat boycott on the Lower East Side in the early 1900s, which forced retail butchers to lower their prices. A current expression might be those women lobbying for no hormones in kosher beef, or the more humane treatment of the calves raised for veal, or vegetarianism. Here's our window onto food as a vehicle for political activism.

The strange sociology of recipes and relationships. If and when they marry, Jewish women marry later than any other group in the US. That means that there may not be opportunities for the intergenerational healing or connecting that can happen routinely when women recreate aspects of their mothers' lives as they become mothers (or "homemakers") themselves. What we're seeing instead (at least at Lilith, where we run an occasional column called "food-culture," which is increasingly about young women looking back on the kitchen products of their mothers and aunts) is a desire to connect through recipes.

In fact, we titled Lilith's most recent food article "How Recipes Reconcile Us." It was all about a 25-year-old Syrian Jewish woman from Brooklyn whose own branch of this large family no longer keeps kosher or makes the family's dishes. The woman gives us her story-cum-recipes, and in the process re-weaves a frayed family connection by mastering the traditional dishes of her relatives. She goes back to her aunt in Brooklyn, determined to claim her rightful part of the family's food legacy by learning the sacred traditional recipes—while not revealing to her cousins that she eats pork, dates non-Jews, and goes out on Friday nights. (As Letty Cottin Pogrebin once said to me—"I don't keep kosher. I just keep the guilt!").

Cookbooks! Beware of what some of them transmit about gender roles and food. How they can shape the consciousness of a generation. Just think about *The Settlement Cookbook.* I grew up with this on my mother's kitchen counter, its subtitle announcing "The Way to a Man's Heart." The frontispiece photo identifies the author: "Mrs. Simon Kander." Side note: A very smart and well-educated Jewish woman who lived next door to me in Winnipeg gave me a Betty Crocker cookbook as a bat mitzvah gift many years ago, inscribing: "Use it well, for more than anything else, this can bring you satisfaction and please those you love throughout your whole life." Even at age 13, while I did occasionally like to play at cooking, I thought there was something darkly unsettling about this promise.

And then there is shabbat. All that emphasis on the serene setting, the delighted family, the perfect meal. And all those male rabbis touting how wonderful and peaceful it is to return home after Friday evening services to a house aglow with shabbat candlelight and see a beautifully set table, children smiling—all, of course, with nary a suggestion of the toil/toll it takes to create this little tableau. Did

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elves do it while the missus was at her law firm?

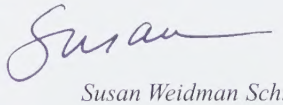
So how do the traditions get adapted to current social realities in a historical moment when even Orthodox women with children work fulltime. Is it that men are cooking more? Has cooking become a family bonding experience? Simplified traditional recipes? Better take-out? (I have been saying for years that all those Jewish institutions with kosher kitchens—JCCs, day schools. etc—should make it easier for families to have a shabbat meal at home together by offering kosher take-out on Friday afternoons, as some Hillels now do.) Log onto www.Lilith.org and share the news, if you or anyone you've eavesdropped on has adapted the experience or expectations of the Friday-evening meal in some other way.

Ambivalence about eating. Jewish-women-and-anorexia is an old story. We've been covering it for years. One problem is our own perfectionism; we have a double dose from the messages of an immigrant people needing to succeed and from a culture in America which encourages female frailty through skinniness. Jewish holidays encourage eating and the ambivalence of the instructions we get from our elders: "Eat! eat!" "Diet, diet!" At the food conference's historical dinner (with dishes from recipes at least 100 years old), food writer Mimi Sheraton alluded to this ambivalence when she quoted her mother, who would first deliver the invitation to eat heartily, and then follow with the eye-rolling comment, "You're such a *fresser!*"

And eating seems to be especially fraught for some young Jewish women because of kashrut (as you'll see in the article in this issue on scrupulosity). Anyone with a propensity for obsessive behavior can have a field day with the detailed constraints around food preparation and eating in Jewish law and practice.

Food as a way of connecting women. I always call my friends while I'm doing holiday cooking. Whatever their day jobs or other obligations, I figure for the day or so before Passover they're in their own kitchens, with a phone under the chin like me. It's a great time to talk.

Food (at least its preparation) may actually be the universal solvent. The attendees at the food conference included twentysomething hotshot Washington lawyers taking a day off to play, retired couples, foodies from the Midwest, and academics exploring foodways as a key to social history. Food gives us a vocabulary that bridges the generations, even if the foods of our foremothers give us carb-anxiety today.



Susan Weidman Schneider
Editor-in-Chief

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Kol Ishah:
The Voices of Women.

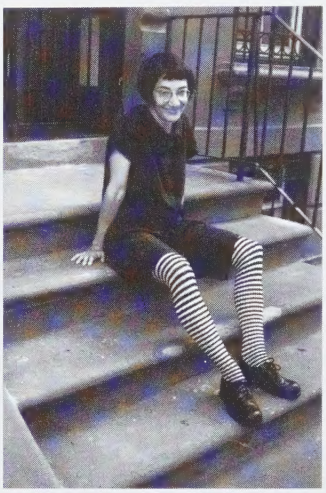
Traditionally, the **voice** of the Jewish woman was **not to be heard** in public, lest it arouse men. **No more.** These pages are for news about Jewish women, **in our own strong voices.**

Women on a Glass Cliff

A study that came to us through the Israel Feminist Forum reveals that successful companies chose male candidates for executive positions, while "businesses that were in trouble chose women." A team at England's Exeter University discovered that "women were offered senior posts because they were better at handling business crises. This led to women being given more difficult jobs with a higher chance of failure. "Lead investigator on the study was professor of psychology and editor of the European Journal of Social Psychology **Alex Haslam**, who reported the findings to the British Association for the Advancement of Science, saying "We've found evidence of this in every company we have looked at. If a company is doing well, then the 'jobs for the boys' rules apply. But if it is in trouble, no man wants to give a job to their friends, so the answer is to get in a woman."

"Bee Season" Flies onto the Big Screen

First, **Myla Goldberg** struck gold in print with her debut novel, *Bee Season*. Published by Doubleday in 2001 with an iconic Webster's Dictionary-like cover, the book earned a handful of awards for fiction and accolades for its multi-layered story of a Jewish family in distress. Now, nearly four years later, Goldberg's masterful storytelling is due to hit the big screen. On an as-yet-undetermined release date in 2005, Fox Searchlight plans to release "Bee Season" the film. Actors **Richard Gere** and **Juliette Binoche** star as parents of a troubled brother and sister who explore spirituality as their parents' marriage deteriorates.



JASON LITTLE

At the heart of "Bee Season" is 9-year-old Eliza Neumann, whose bittersweet, coming-of-age story anchors the drama. Portrayed by newcomer **Flora Cross**, Eliza is a mediocre student who unexpectedly sweeps her school's spelling bee. In the book, her parents are Jewish and her father leads a congregation. In the upcoming film, directors **Scott McGehee** and **David Siegel** recast Eliza's father as a Jewish college professor, portrayed by Gere. The mental health of his Catholic wife, played by Binoche, grows increasingly unstable as the story unfolds.

To avoid dealing with his failing marriage and his family's growing dysfunction, Gere's character immerses himself with his daughter's training for a national spelling bee. When he discovers her superior mental gifts for memorization, he supplements her spelling exercises with mystical teachings from the classic Kabbalistic text, the Zohar. His efforts foreshadow impending doom. Such studies are far too demanding for children, even the most gifted ones.

Meanwhile, Eliza's on-screen older brother Aaron, played by first-time actor **Max Minghella**, son of "Cold Mountain" director **Anthony Minghella**, begins to fall for the cult practices of his Hare Krishna girlfriend, played by **Kate Bosworth**. In preparation for convincing on-screen performances, Gere and his on-screen kids were tutored in proper pronunciation of Hebrew verses from the Torah.

The movie, whose screenplay was written by **Naomi Foner**, already boasts rumors of Oscar contention for Gere and Binoche. It's a remarkable step for novelist Goldberg, who lives in Brooklyn with her husband **Jason Little**. A graduate of Oberlin College, Goldberg is also an accomplished flutist, banjo and accordion player, and an afficionado of independent and foreign films. Oddly enough given recent developments, Goldberg once predicted her book would make a "good indie feature" Now she's spelling H-O-L-L-Y-W-O-O-D.

—Lisa Alcalay Klug

Giving a Voice—and a Face—to Rio's Poorest

Brazilian Jewish filmmaker **Daniela Broitman** set out to give voice to poor Brazilians struggling against drug wars, violence, and challenges from the Brazilian government, its police force, and global corporations. Her 70-minute documentary, "Voices from the Edge—The Favela Goes to the World Social Forum" (made with Fernando Salis), introduces us to community leaders from the slums of Rio de Janeiro. With Broitman toting video camera, 23 of them embarked upon their first-ever journey—by bus to the third annual World Social Forum (WSF) in Porto Alegre, Brazil.

The World Social Forum, Broitman told Lilith recently, is "an alternative to the World Economic Forum that occurs annually in Davos, Switzerland. Yet the voices of the poorest are rarely heard at this important meeting, and thus underrepresented." Broitman's vision stretches beyond 70 minutes of film footage, however. "This is not just a film, this is a social project I'm doing."

Where did a Jewish girl from a privileged background get her passion about the Rio slum-dwellers? Born in the largest city in Brazil, Sao Paolo, Broitman recalls Jewish culture serving as an integral part of her upbringing. Broitman's father came to Brazil at age seven with his parents, survivors of the Holocaust. Her Jewish Romanian grandparents, directly upon marriage, were sent to concentration camp—together. Says Broitman, "They used to say that their honeymoon was spent in the concentration camps."

Speaking of herself and a good friend, she explains, "We're different than the average Jewish woman in Brazil. I think a lot of Jewish women are really concerned about family and marriage, not as much about their careers. They're glad enough to find a man with a good job who can support them in our [difficult] economy. Of course, they would prefer Jewish men, but anyone who has a stable income is good."

Her next big project? Broitman is toying with the idea of a documentary on her grandparents' Holocaust experience and immersion into Brazilian culture.

—Ilana Kramer

To learn more about the "Voices from the Edge" go to www.videoforum.tv

top: Daniela Broitman and Fernando Salis

center: The only water source in the slum of Terra Encantada

bottom: D. Quita—junk recycler

Sexual Assault in Israel—On the Rise

Sexual assault crisis centers in Israel took 21,000 calls in the first nine months of 2004, **Ruth Sinai** reports in the Israeli newspaper Ha'aretz. Nearly 5,600 of the calls were initial appeals from women reporting they had been raped or sexually assaulted in some other manner.

Sinai's piece continues: "More than one-third of the victims—some 36 percent—were assaulted when they were under the age of 12. Around a quarter were attacked during adolescence....Men accounted for about 14 percent of the calls, and the number of men appealing for help continues to rise.

"As in past years, some 40 percent of this year's female victims were assaulted in their homes, 11 percent were assaulted in the attacker's residence, and the rest in schools, universities and places of employment. Only a small portion of the assaults occurred in public spaces. According to the latest data, 22 percent of all of those who made reports to the crisis centers also filed police complaints and pursued criminal proceedings against their attackers—double the number before the crisis centers' association launched a legal assistance project.

"However, as in other countries, it is estimated that only 10 percent of sexual assault victims in Israel turn to crisis centers."

kol ishah

Perfecting those Private Parts?

Sandy Kobrin reports that surgery to reshape the labia and other areas of the vagina is picking up fast, according to plastic surgeons such as **Dr. Pamela Loftus** of Boca Raton, Florida. While some women undergo the operations to improve comfort, many want to conform to ideals set by the porn industry.

In a cover story in Women's E-News (www.womensenews.org), Kobrin writes that "Labiaplasty was once the domain of sex workers, nude entertainers, nude models, swimsuit models and the occasional woman who needed her labia reduced for medical reasons such as infection or pain. Not anymore. Doctors have reported that women from every walk of life and from ages 15 to 75 are having labia and cosmetic vaginal surgery.

"Many doctors who perform the surgeries say while there are some women who opt for the surgery because they are unhappy or their labia has caused them physical discomfort, the bulk of the women getting this surgery are ultimately being pressured by men who want them to conform to a idea of beauty most often seen in the porn industry. Doctors say these women request the procedure because they are afraid of having 'old looking' vaginas."

Jewish Women on Both Sides of the Prison Walls

In the mid-1970s, **Karen Ramos**, a divorced Jewish mother of two, was living in New York with a man she'd met working in the garment district. When he asked her to bring envelopes of his "textile samples" from home, she unsuspectingly complied. The envelopes, as it happened, contained cocaine, and the transaction was photographed. Under New York State's Rockefeller drug laws, these circumstances spelled a sentence of 15 years to life. Since then, the number of incarcerated women in New York State has increased by 500 percent, nearly double the rate for men, reflecting a trend nationwide. In November, the U.S. Department of Justice reported that the number of women in state and federal prisons is at an all-time high, with the incarceration rate for females increasing at nearly twice that of men. In a 1978 interview, Ramos told Lilith that she intended to devote her life to law reform. "I've seen the injustices," she said.

Tamar Kraft-Stolar

Many Jewish women have, like Karen Ramos, seen the injustices—although most of them, luckier than Karen, have observed them from the outside. As a result, growing numbers of Jewish women are committed to revamping the U.S. criminal justice system and changing society's perception of female convicts.

One of these activists is **Tamar Kraft-Stolar**, director of the Correctional Association of New York's Women in Prison Project. The daughter of parents she describes as "Jewish radical lawyers," she invests about 60 hours a week in her job, which includes monitoring conditions at women's correctional facilities and coordinating an annual lobbying day in Albany.

"Many women are incarcerated for minor drug offenses," Kraft-Stolar notes, but also for other crimes such as property offenses. She says that perpetrators of such crimes are rarely a threat to public safety, and are well suited to counseling and treatment programs—consuming far fewer tax dollars than prisons. These, says Kraft-Stolar, "allow women offenders to serve their time while addressing the underlying problems that led to their behavior." Equally important, "They allow women to stay connected to their families and communities," while prisons are often located hundreds of miles away. Since 75 percent of women are mothers and their children's main caregivers, plucking them from their homes for minor infractions also means cruel and unusual punishment for thousands of kids.

Under the one-punishment-fits-all sentencing laws of former New York governor Nelson Rockefeller, judges cannot consider mitigating factors or even a defendant's role. This hurts women, who tend to have low-level roles such as drug-carrying "mules." Since one way to evade time is to provide information, drug lords sometimes manage to snitch their way to freedom, while underlings have few such bargaining chips.

Martha Stewart notwithstanding, most women in prison are from poor communities of color. **Phyllis Chesler,** author of *Women and Madness* and *Mothers on Trial* among other books, is a psychotherapist and an expert courtroom witness who has testified on behalf of women denied health care and otherwise mistreated in prison. "Through my involvement with the civil rights, anti-war, and feminist movements in the 1960s," Chesler says she saw "more African-Americans going to jail than seemed just." That trend has intensified.

Few Jewish women are behind bars; of the 2,821 women incarcerated in New York State, only 40 are Jewish. "Maybe the Jewish women are all in therapy," Chesler speculates. And she's not joking. Middle-class women address their problems with therapy or

treatment, while poor women without that recourse have more difficulty kicking a drug habit, and sometimes resort to other criminal behaviors to fund it. Furthermore, residents of poor neighborhoods with heavy police presence are more likely to be arrested on drug charges, while their counterparts in affluent areas engage in drug use and sale with few legal consequences.

Chesler also points to the role of domestic violence: "Prison is the ultimate punishment for staying in an abusive relationship," she says.

One Jewish woman—we'll call her **Sarah**—served time for killing her abusive husband. He had been obsessively jealous and increasingly violent. He bound and gagged her. He broke her arm. "Eventually, the crime…I don't really recall exactly what happened. I'd had an argument with my husband, and he forced me to take pills. He told me he would hit me if I didn't take them, so I took them. I certainly take responsibility, but I don't have an actual recollection of the event of him being shot." Sarah pleaded guilty to manslaughter in the first degree and received a sentence of three to 10 years. During the three years she served, she participated in the Jewish events—religious services and Bible study—held in the prison. Today Sarah works for an organization that helps survivors of domestic violence. "I don't want what happened to me to happen to other women."

Eve Ensler

The personal experience of violence at home led feminist playwright **Eve Ensler** to a similar conclusion. The acclaimed author of "The Vagina Monologues" and the new play "The Good Body," Ensler is another Jewish woman who has survived abuse. For the past six years, she has been teaching a writing class to violent female offenders at Bedford Hills prison for women in Westchester County, outside New York City. "What I've seen," she told Lilith, "is how much women in prison long to tell their stories." Her class was filmed for the PBS documentary "What I Want My Words To Do." "I would venture to say that 80 percent of the women have suffered violence," says Ensler, whose work on projects such as V-day focuses on ending violence against women.

But abuse, she notes, does not absolve women of accountability. "As one of the women said, 'Not everybody responds by killing people.' What I'm very moved by is how willing the women in my class are to take responsibility." A Jewish inmate in Ensler's class, **Judith Clark,** was in prison for activities with the Weather Underground. In the film, she discusses a Yom Kippur meditation "about why Judaism wouldn't be for the death penalty." It said "that as long as someone is alive, there is hope that they will change, and take responsibility. But if you take that away, you stop a process." Kraft-Stolar concurs. "Women incarcerated for violent offenses still deserve to be treated humanely. Having these women serve such long periods of time isn't in anyone's interest—not the community, not the victim's family, or the inmate, who languishes in prison even after she's shown remorse and completely changed her thinking."

As for the drug war, public opinion is turning against New York State's Rockefeller-era mandatory-sentencing laws, and many politicians favor some reform, although a deal has yet to materialize. The efforts of Kraft-Stolar and the Women in Prison Project have borne fruit in other legislative victories, including temporary-release eligibility for prisoners incarcerated for defending themselves against their abusers. The Women in Prison Project is now working on passage of another bill, co-sponsored by New York State Assemblywoman **Helene Weinstein,** which would make these women eligible for expanded merit time. In the words of Eve Ensler, "We need to create world where people are not frozen forever in one terrible mistake."

—Rebecca Tuhus-Dubrow

kol ishah

Post-Election Cleansing

I felt a deep need for purification after the Bush election. I had done my best, working for three weeks as a volunteer for the Kerry Campaign in Akron, Ohio. When it was over, I wanted to rid not just my mind but my body of the Bush Campaign. The ritual of the mikvah felt right.

I had been to a mikvah once, before my marriage two years ago. It's the kind of mikvah a non-religious New Yorker can feel comfortable with—right next door to the Stand-Up New York Comedy Club on the Upper West Side.

When I called to find out mikvah hours, I told Mrs. L. that I felt the need for cleansing after the election. She said she did, too. (She was a Bush supporter but didn't vote.)

The pre-mikvah preparation is a purification in itself—removing all traces of nail polish, navel lint, checking for nipple cleanliness. Before Mrs. L. let me climb down into the pool, she inspected me for total cleanliness; no prayers because this was not a pre-marriage or post-menstrual immersion. Then into the water, jump up, completely immerse, surface fast to avoid touching the sides of the pool. Three times. I didn't feel purified, but I did feel cleansed.

"See you in four years," Mrs. L. said as I left.

—Amy Stone

kol ishah

The Woman Transforming Old Hatred into New Empathy

As a girl in Lithuania, **Irena Veisaite** spent more than two years in the Kovno Ghetto. Separated from her parents—her father had fled the country and her mother was shot during the first weeks of the war—she suffered from cold, hunger, and fear of the murderous roundups that claimed the lives of thousands of inmates.

Irena Veisaite

Then, gentile friends provided her with forged documents. One morning at dawn she mingled with a work brigade and made her way past the ghetto gate. She soon found a home with a Lithuanian woman who had six other children, a woman she calls her "second mother." With her, she survived the war.

Veisaite's love for her two mothers molded her as a woman, and today, that double devotion shapes her as an influential leader of Lithuania's effort to confront its 20th-century past. "I am a person with two identities," she says. "I am Jewish and I am Lithuanian, and I love my country."

Veisaite, 76, is at the forefront of a complicated process of reconciliation that began when Lithuania gained its independence from the Soviet Union in 1991.

Until 2002, she chaired the Open Society Fund-Lithuania, which seeks to build democratic institutions. She believes that in order to move forward Lithuania's citizens must examine their past—together. "This is not a Jewish project," she says. "It is a question for all of us in common."

Lithuania's past is complex, and facing it has not been easy.

From the window of her Vilnius flat, Veisaite can look down on the crisp spires and pink facades of the city formerly known as "the Jerusalem of the North." Once, Jews were a third of the population here. The streets were alive with Jewish schools, synagogues, shops, libraries, theaters. During World War II, 90 percent of the nation's Jews died at the hands of the Nazis and their Lithuanian collaborators. Today, Lithuania's entire Jewish community numbers only 4,500.

Nor did the end of the war bring peace to this tiny Baltic land. Lithuania became part of the USSR, a transition accompanied by bloody resistance, mass deportations, and a giant economic upheaval. A theory of "dual genocides," etc.—which blames Jews for creating the conditions for Soviet oppression—is widely accepted among many Lithuanians.

"Of course everyone sees his own suffering first of all," Veisaite says. "This didn't contribute to an easy dialogue."

Nonetheless, Veisaite has worked vigorously to promote such dialogue. For the Jewish museum, she initiated an exhibit called "Jewish Life in Lithuania," which has traveled to a dozen Lithuanian cities and towns. She worked with the House of Memory, which developed an essay contest entitled "Jews: Neighbors of Our Parents and Grandparents" that sends schoolchildren out into their communities to conduct interviews about the past. At Vilnius University, she chaired the Stateless Cultures Centre, which draws scholars from all over the world to study at the Yiddish Institute. These projects have won international acclaim, and hundreds of teachers from across Lithuania are now involved.

Veisaite appeals to gentiles and Jews alike to stop accusing one another and instead to listen. "Hatred destroys you," she says. "You should not live with this feeling." Among her mother's last words to her, she recalls, were these: "Never take revenge."

She tells of a Holocaust survivor lecturing at a Lithuanian high school. A young man of 17 or 18 came up to the old man in tears. "My grandfather was a killer of Jews," the student said. "What should I do?" The survivor embraced and kissed him, saying, "You don't have to do anything. It's enough for you to understand."

"This young man will remember that his grandfather was a killer," Veisaite says, "but he will also remember the goodness of the survivor, and he will live up to that goodness in his own way."

Veisaite sees signs of progress in Vilnius. Recently, after "an appalling series of anti-Semitic articles" appeared in the newspaper, there was an immediate public outcry. "Within two days, there were almost 200 organizations and individuals protesting. This is a very big achievement."

Is Reform Judaism Becoming Feminized?

"Where have the men gone?" asked reporter **Rachel Zoll** in an Associated Press story appearing in the Washington Post. Zoll presented data that females outnumber males in leadership positions in the Reform movement, the most liberal branch of Judaism.

"Men just don't know where they fit in," she quoted **Doug Barden** as saying. He's the executive director of the movement's brotherhoods. **Rabbi Jacqueline Koch Ellenson,** director of the Women's Rabbinic Network, told Zoll that "Women have become very involved. To see that as a threat to men is an extremely, extremely dangerous way of looking at it."

In May, when Lithuania joined the European Union, Veisaite represented her country at an outdoor ceremony in Berlin. Standing at the Brandenburg Gate, she reminded members of the crowd that they were gathered "not far from the Reichstag, where as a child I was condemned to die." Against all odds, she survived, and so had her deep feeling for her native land. Slowly but surely, she feels, Lithuania is changing. "Today," she said, "I speak proudly in the name of my country."

—Ellen Cassedy

Is it Just a T.V. Show?

A group of high-octane women gathered recently in New York City for a panel entitled "Airbrush This!" Exploring the consequences of how females are portrayed in the media today were **Elaine Lafferty,** editor of Ms. Magazine; **Claire Mysko** of Girls, Inc.; mommy-wars author **Sylvia Hewlett,** radio personality and reporter **Karen Hunter** and writer **Catherine Orenstein.**

The conversation began with "The Stepford Wives," the movie in which husbands kill their spouses in order to replace them with "perfect" robots. Orenstein described this as a horror film, mirroring "today's obsession with plastic surgery." From the frightening town of Stepford, the panelists shifted to reality television shows, especially those involving surgical makeovers like "The Swan" and "I Want a Famous Face." "It's through these shows," explained Orenstein, "that now we all want to be Barbie instead of being ourselves." Hunter batted back: "It's just a T.V. show!"

When the women moved on to teenage girls today, Orenstein railed against T-shirts bearing masochistic, violent slogans like "Beat me, rape me, but just don't touch my hair." The audience, mostly women in their 30s to 50s, included two high schoolers: myself and my friend, **Alexandra Ilyashov**. (Last year, we had tried to begin a Gender in the Media club at our relatively liberal high school. People came to the first meeting, ate the pizza and left.) We looked at each other. We were directly in the middle of this age range of the T-shirt wearers, even knew people who flaunted these shirts (or similar ones: "I slept with the band," "My boyfriend's out of town" and "I did it with Justin [Timberlake]"), but neither of us could understand why girls wore them, or why the rights that our foremothers fought so hard for were being completely ignored. A pretty dramatic step backwards from what we thought the feminist movement had achieved.

The next day, Alexandra and I went out for lunch to discuss the fallout from the evening before. Was our generation full of anti-feminists? Is it true that degrading reality shows, or any show, was "just a T.V. show"? What effects are these shows having on our peers? Why, even in a small, open-minded New York City high school was no one interested in becoming, as Mysko called it, "media literate"? We were surprised that Hunter, a woman considered to be a feminist, would refer to these derogatory television shows as unimportant. (And, in response to the possibility of *Roe v. Wade* being overturned, Hunter said she didn't believe this would cause any sort of outrage among young women—something Alex and I found shocking). As we carried the food to a table, our conversation moved to the television shows we watch. Alex sheepishly admitted that she loved "Sex and the City," a show Orenstein was particularly critical of. I then divulged the only reality television show that I ever watched: "The Apprentice." As we exercised our media literacy, we found that even on a show that brings in smart, reputable women, they are reduced to mud-slinging, catty sorority girls, using sex to win tasks (kissing every customer who buys their product). As we threw away our plates and headed back to school, we established that our society is not completely comfortable with strong, successful women.

At our lockers, Alexandra turned and asked, "Why can't women be independent, strong, feminine and sexy and still be taken seriously? Instead, the media portray us as choosing to be permanently altered to erase our individuality. If we're able to be ourselves, why do some chose to look like everyone else?"

—Kaitlin Ofman

For more information on other events from the Center for Communication, which sponsored the panel along with HBO, visit www.cencom.org

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Are you the person who called the Lilith office to find out about an article on adult bat mitzvah ceremonies? Or the one who has been struggling to recall the name of the author who wrote about adopting a Chinese daughter? Or the date when Lilith ran an analysis of Jewish women's philanthropy? You can now find answers to these and other ineffable questions on Lilith's freshly redesigned website.

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The new, user-friendly Lilith website is made possible through the generosity of Targum Shlishi, an Aryeh and Raquel Rubin Foundation; The Rita J. and Stanley H. Kaplan Family Foundation; the Franklin Philanthropic Foundation; the Council of Literary Magazines and Presses; and readers like you.

Malkie

An Immigrant to the Wider World Adjusts Her Compass

PAINTING BY BELLA BARAN

by Malka Schwartz

Four years ago I celebrated my first Thanksgiving. I remember sitting on a metal park bench outside of my grandmother's apartment building trying to find the right words to describe how thankful I was for her generosity. It was a windy day and fallen leaves were spinning in circles on the surface of the white stone pavement. I thought about what a challenge the wind must have been for the Pilgrims, and I knew that while the wind wasn't creating challenges in my life I had in fact just landed on new territory. It had been only a few days since I had traveled across the ocean that separated the insular Lubavitch community in Crown Heights from the secular world outside of it.

My pilgrimage began only a month earlier—on Simhat Torah, when Jews around the world were dancing with the Torah.

I made sure every lock on the front door was bolted. I climbed down the stairs to my room in the basement. It was dark down there, but switching on a light just wasn't an option; this was a holy day. I needed every minute I could buy to hide what I was doing. I left my door half open, open enough for me to hear someone opening the locks of my house, and closed enough to prevent anyone from hearing me in case they walked in unnoticed. I sat down on my bed. I was alone. Yet, I seemed to be in the unwanted presence of multitudes of thoughts and fears. I wasn't sure I really wanted to do this. I had consciously decided that I would pick up the phone, but I couldn't picture doing it. I couldn't picture myself breaking a contract that I knew I had signed and was lucky to have signed, as a soul without a body thousands of years ago. I couldn't see myself disobeying God's law, one so important to Him that during the times of the Temple a desecrator would be deserving of death. I couldn't imagine what life would be without the Torah, without Shabbos, without knowing what God wanted from me, without knowing the purpose of my creation and the creation of the entire universe. I feared that I was doing something terribly wrong, something that would haunt me forever, something that would deem me tainted; and something I would always regret.

My parents had taken tremendous pride in my observance of Judaism; how could I disappoint them? They had devoted the last 19 years of their lives raising my eight siblings and me to be Lubavitch. They davened with us, and trained us to practice all the rituals, teaching and following all the laws pertaining to holidays, daily routines, dress, diet and more. Besides, for my parents this lifestyle was an exciting discovery; they themselves were not born into the community. They had joined Lubavitch before they got married. I could not explain to myself why I was preparing myself to hurt my parents and sacrifice my relationship with my Creator to live a selfish life governed by temptations. Would movies and fun parks now become my spiritual peaks?

I was 19 years old and I'd been rather comfortable in my role as the oldest of nine siblings. For years I shared the dream of many of my peers: I'd get married, have children, raise them to be Lubavitchers and work with my future husband as emissaries of the Rebbe. I was certain that the only way I could attain happiness was by maintaining the purity of that way of life. The Torah, I was told, was a God-given shield, protecting me from the dangerous possibility of entering a corrupt society. I was constantly reminded how lucky I was to have the words of God guiding my every move. I blessed God numerous times a day for giving me the opportunity to be His servant. I thanked Him for giving me the privilege of keeping His commandments.

The Torah was the centerpiece of my life. I was always happy doing what God wanted me to do, dressing in what God wanted me to wear, eating what God wanted me to eat, behaving the way God wanted me to behave.

I wished I could somehow make it disappear, the prescribed path my life was expected to follow. I could not feel blessed or privileged to have that book to call my own. I wanted to go to school and learn. I wanted to find out how other people led their lives. I wanted to know if the only true way to live was the way I knew it. I questioned the authority of the Torah. I found myself choosing between two totally different lives. I either thought the Torah was divine and therefore committed my life to it, or I would recognize it as text that a select few considered

Leaving the Hasidic family, and a whole universe of certainty.

to be divine, a precept that would no longer obligate me to the Hasidic lifestyle. For a year already, I had examined and reexamined which one I should choose. I battled between the powerful sense of purpose supplied by my community and a life that was unknown to me.

Perhaps I was jumping into an ocean filled with deadly sharks. I felt as though I was separating myself from a species I had grown to love, from people who had the secret recipe for life. They were blessed with brilliant scholars, smarter than I by far. They surely knew what I could do to reconnect with God. They were my celebrities, my role models, my inspiration to live; how could I trust my young desire to leave? Would I ever be able to forgive myself later?

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www.lilith.org

My hand moved towards the telephone. At that moment, the casual action had become an action filled with deep meanings, of loss, of fear, of freedom, of individuality. The gray plastic telephone felt cold. I crouched over it, lifted the receiver and held it to my ear. There was a dial tone. It sounded louder than it did during the week. I had sinned just by touching the phone on a holy day, and by causing the device to spring into action, but relief was the only lightning that struck. All of a sudden, an entire year of thought materialized into action. The phone company now had my feelings on record.

The days following Simhat Torah were rather frightening. I walked among my family and friends afraid to reveal to them what I had done. Within the community I was a stranger in my own disguise. Fortunately, my father's family lived in Manhattan, and with no one else to call, I reached out to them. As soon as I contacted them, they offered me support. My grandmother invited me to live with her as I began to attend Hunter College. Even after being diagnosed with cancer two months later, she made herself available to me for late-hour discussions and weekend walks. She gave me a safe place to confront my own confusion and pain. She was a constant, loving and most valuable source of support up until her death in December 2002.

Putting on pants was letting everyone know that I had left the community.

One of the breakthrough moments she saw me through was when I bought my first pair of pants. I really can't say how I brought myself to swing open the glass doors of the Ann Taylor store on Forty-Second Street and Lexington Avenue. It had been six weeks since I left Crown Heights and I had never even thought about buying a pair of pants. But, there I was watching as my hand reached out and grabbed a pair of black velvet pants.

I kept thinking to myself. "But you can't buy them without trying them on. No, don't try them on. If you try them on you are going to be too scared to take them home. Buy them and leave, Malkie, leave. If they are that awful you'll return them later."

I raced towards the counter. I watched as the cashier carefully folded them, wrapped them in pink paper and placed them into a clear Ann Taylor bag. I didn't think they should be treated with any less care. They were my pants, my first pair of pants. I wanted to tell everyone in the store; I thought they should know that this was no ordinary shopping excursion. Instead, I paid and raced toward the door, afraid that if I stayed any longer I'd give them back.

I walked into my grandmother's house and told her about my purchase. She smiled and eagerly asked to see them. I put them on for her but refused to look down at my lower body. I could feel them on my hips and I knew they were probably too big. Maybe sizing was different for pants. My grandmother confirmed that they were too big on me but insisted that they were beautiful anyway and recommended that I "take them for a walk" around the block. First, I thought, I should try sitting in them. So I turned on the television and sat with my legs folded just stared at the screen. About a half an hour later, once it was already dark, I stood up ready to take a walk around the corner. Occasionally, I'd sneak a peak at my legs and then lift my face up in shock. Putting on a pair of pants was essentially letting everyone know that I took the plunge into a life that left me isolated from the community in which I was raised.

I had stepped out into a world where everything seemed strange, but now I couldn't even recognize myself. During the previous six weeks, I had managed to maintain a connection to my past by adhering to their dress code. It meant that there was still a possibility of reentering the community if I wanted to. I was afraid of falling; I was afraid to find out that I might not be able to stand up and live without their support. But now, I was ready. I was ready for the opportunity to go to college, to meet people from other backgrounds, to eat different foods, to wear what I wanted to wear and to construct my own value system. I was ready to fall away from my past and embrace the life the fall would bring. I no longer felt the need to hide behind what was familiar.

In my Hasidic elementary school, my teacher would often tell the story of a religious girl who was sentenced to death in Russia. Her death sentence was unusually cruel. Her long hair would be tied to the back of a horse drawn wagon and she would be dragged through the streets so that everyone could see what would happen to them if they broke the Russian law. Being the righteous woman she was, she took pins, similar to safety pins, and sewed her clothing to her skin in order to keep it from being exposed as she was dragged through the streets of the Russian town. I have no idea whether or not this incident actually took place. However, growing up this woman was my role model, as she is for thousands of Hasidic girls. She put herself through additional pain so that she would be modest while she was being killed.

I realized that I admired this woman for refusing to transgress a principle that was important to her. Yes, she sacrificed her wellbeing for modesty, but perhaps it is enough to say that she sacrificed her wellbeing for a principle. Although my principle seemingly contradicted hers, and upholding it was not going to be as torturous, I was doing something that was important to me.

From then on, every time I put on a skirt it reminded me of my past—that is until December 23, 2002, the day my grandmother died. I was sitting opposite Debbie, my aunt, holding the hand of my grandmother. But all I could think about was that my father was on his way, and I was wearing pants. Although I had been wearing pants for over a year now, he had never seen me without a skirt. I couldn't imagine standing in front of him wearing a pair of pants. I knew it would disappoint him, not as badly as his mother's impending death…but still. I couldn't do it to him. But then, I also couldn't leave my grandmother's side to change into a skirt. That

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seemed ridiculous. I couldn't believe how selfish I was, bringing my own worries into my grandmother's death. Either way, it was clear that while I was trying not to think about my clothes, I couldn't avoid it.

I let go of my grandmother's hand and, as quietly as I could, walked out of the room. I ran towards my closet and pulled the first skirt I saw off its hanger. It was long and khaki. I took off my pants, slid on the skirt and buried the pants under a pile of junk, just in case my father would open the closet door. Was I really afraid, or was I eager to give him the respect he deserved? Perhaps I was embracing who I was, a young woman with the possibility of wearing both skirts and pants.

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Now she helps other questioners

"People leaving this ultra-Orthodox world enter mainstream America as new immigrants in every sense."

Two months before my grandmother passed away, I became aware that there are other young people from various Hasidic communities who need, as I did, resources to help them think about what direction they want to pursue in their lives. I'd had my grandmother for the basic support that allowed me to go to college, but I know that this was an unusual circumstance.

The focus of a Hasidic education is to prepare a youngster to fulfill his or her religious responsibilities, and it does not prepare people to seek opportunities outside of the community. Ultra-Orthodox communities shut their members off from the contemporary secular world in order to keep outside influences from challenging their basic beliefs or affecting their highly structured way of life. Education is carefully controlled; for boys it consists almost entirely of religious subjects. Girls are given a limited practical education. Exposure to radio, television, movies, secular newspapers and literature of any kind is officially prohibited. For many, this is a satisfying life, one that offers security and comfort. But there is no alternative for those who question the community's values or who want to get an education.

Choosing one's own path or questioning the community's usually means suffering a wrenching break from family members, who are at best critical and, at worst, reject them completely. Friends and community institutions often withdraw their support, and people leaving this ultra-Orthodox world enter mainstream America as new immigrants in every sense.

This profound sense of cultural disorientation and isolation, coupled with a lack of practical, marketable skills, makes it both extremely difficult and absolutely essential to acquire educational credentials and professional skills while coping with devastating loneliness. The stress can lead people to engage in extreme formerly prohibited behavior, such as drug and alcohol abuse, unsafe sex and criminal activity. The new organization Footsteps enables people to access resources that help them adjust to the larger society.

Footsteps helps people who approach on their own initiative. Assistance is available to any member or former member of an ultra-Orthodox religious community, whether that person has chosen to leave the community or to remain a part of it. Footsteps is not anti-religious, and does not attempt to persuade anyone to leave the ultra-Orthodox world. The fundamental principle that guides Footsteps is the right of the individual to choose his or her own way of life. If an individual does decide to explore the outside world, Footsteps offers the kinds of basic support needed to enable this quest: classes in preparing for a high-school equivalency certificate, basic information about the outside world, discussion about the emotional difficulties one may experience. While I try to provide people with the resources I received, I continue to base a lot of Footsteps' programming on what I see were and are my own needs.

Every individual who seeks a life outside of the community has a different experience. I have begun explaining my own sense of loss with a parable that makes it easier to understand. Say you spend twenty years of your life thinking chocolate is the best food for you in every way, good for your body as well as your soul. You can count on the fact that God and your entire support system of parents and friends will applaud each time you take a bite of chocolate. You eat chocolate and God smiles. You wake up at a certain time because if you wake up any later there will be no chocolate left. And when you get dressed, you dress according to the way people who eat chocolate should get dressed, perhaps in all brown clothes. And then, you can only go to school where they serve chocolate. What would it be like if you were to spend time with people who weren't stocked up on chocolate? Too risky.

Now, entertain the possibility that there are other flavors, vanilla to name just one, and it is just as good for you. Most important, imagine what it would be like to live a life different from the "truth" that the "The Torah is Divine." How does someone maneuver in a world of vanilla after stepping out of a world that was sterilized and protected from any vanilla influence? The challenges that the vanilla world presents me with leaves me with a unique taste for vanilla—one that is bittersweet.

—M.S.

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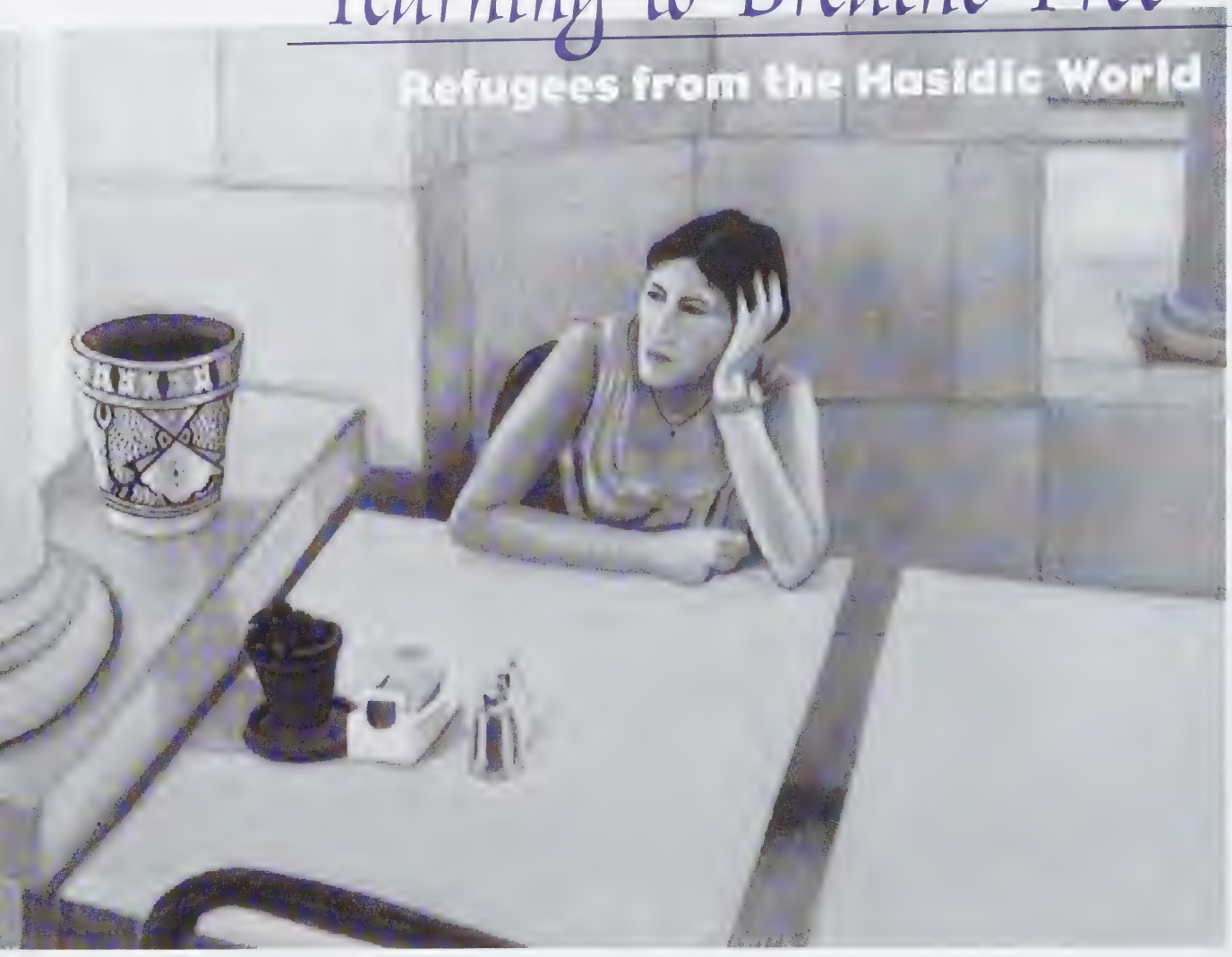
"Yearning to Breathe Free"

Refugees from the Hasidic World



PAINTING BY BELLA BARAN

The women are doing all they can to make me feel welcome (plying me with food, complimenting my sweater, producing photos of children), though I am sure this is just as awkward for them as it is for me. All of them are members of the extremely insular Satmar Hasidic sect, and mingling with a secular Jew like me—let alone having one in their home for a meal—is something most would do only under very unusual circumstances, if at all. But despite their hair coverings (monochromatic cloth turbans) and modest dress (long-sleeved, high-necked sweaters, skirts well below the knee, thick stockings), there is something about these women that seems familiar, and soon I begin to feel more at ease.

As we eat, the women pepper me with questions: What exactly is a dissertation, and a Ph.D., for that matter? Is there any money in this line of work? Will I publish a book, and will they be in it? These women are hardly meek or shy, as those who would equate their tradition-bound role with submissiveness might expect. Their profound lack of familiarity with the ways of the outside culture is striking, certainly. Contemporary Hasidic ideology dictates that they be raised to avoid almost all exposure to what the community understands to be the corrupt secular society; as such they (as well as men) are not supposed to watch television, see movies, read secular newspapers, magazines, or books, use the Internet, or go to college. However, this does not stop them from being curious, and from trying to get a clear picture of who I am and what it is I want from them.

I try to explain that I am interested in them because, to an outsider at least, it seems their lives might be quite difficult. Responsible for bearing and raising as many as 10 or 12 children (to husbands they have met only once or twice before marriage), they are not permitted to engage in the kind of religious study men do, and are instead expected to focus on maintaining a Jewish home and family. How do they handle so many children? Do they ever get time for themselves? Do they sometimes wish they could sit and learn as the men do?

The women immediately jump in to correct my "misimpression." They know all about feminism, they assure me, but the feminists are wrong. They are happy and fulfilled by what they do—bringing Jewish children into the world and raising them in a Jewish home and community is the most important work there is. Yes, of course they have their challenges; this life

is not always easy but, then again, it is hard to be a Jew, and we all must make sacrifices to live as God's "chosen."

As I listen, I try to imagine myself in their place. This is impossible.

It is getting late and, one by one, the women excuse themselves, citing children who need bathing and bedtime stories. Several mention that it is rare for them to have a night out like this, an occasion to reflect on and talk about their lives; those who were relatively quiet throughout the evening explain that their community's emphasis on female modesty sometimes makes it hard for them to talk about themselves at all.

All the guests have left, and Gitty, the hostess, motions for me to sit down. I do, and she pulls her chair next to mine. "So, what did you think?" she asks, somewhat conspiratorially.

Just then, Gitty's daughter, Chanie, arrives at the apartment with her 3-year-old son in tow. Wearing a pretty wig (no turban) and a fashionable suede skirt, Chanie introduces herself to me and smiles. "So what did you think?" she asks, echoing her mother's words and tone precisely. She has a mischevious glint in her eye.

I tell Chanie and Gitty that I found the women impressive—lively and somehow tough, despite their obvious modesty. I say that I am very interested in spending more time among them. Though I may not be able to muster their conviction, or to reconcile what they believe with other things I know about the world and how it works, I am hoping that these women will help me see things from their perspective. Chanie smiles politely, waits a minute, then replies, "Well, that's all very well and good, but do you want to hear the real story, the truth? The truth?" she asks again, her eyebrows raised with intent. I am stunned and say nothing.

Chanie makes it clear that she is profoundly religious, that she loves Judaism and the Hasidic way of life. She and her husband keep all the commandments and they are raising their son to do the same. But then she looks at her mother and says, "I bet they talked all about their children and how wonderful their lives are, didn't they?" Her mother nods and suppresses a laugh.

"These women are very secretive," Chanie continues. "Look, there is negativity and then there is the truth. And the truth includes positive and negative. These women are not able to be honest, especially in a group. There is a lot of hypocrisy here among the Satmar women, and a high rate of suicide. They don't know how to go any deeper than their shirt. They may know the truth subconsciously, but they are not even aware of it."

I don't know how to respond. Is this true about the suicide rate? I have heard from doctors about high rates of anxiety and depression among the Hasidim (not just the Satmarers), as well as spousal abuse, but it is not yet clear to me whether this is a result of the lifestyle, or other factors. And suicide? This is news to me. There isn't anything published about suicide that I have seen, though I have been in close contact with a psychiatrist who treats many Satmar patients and has told me that a large percentage of his patients suffer from anxiety, panic, and depressive disorders. However, the fear of exposure (related to the belief that mental illness is a punishment from God for religious laxity) prevents the community from openly acknowledging these issues, and doctors who treat the Hasidim tend to keep this information quiet, out of respect for the community. This psychiatrist has also, interestingly, identified a syndrome he calls "post- mikvah panic disorder" among women who faint or have panic attacks after going to the mikvah because they are anxious about having sex, which they must do after the mikvah.

"No one will ever say their kid drove them crazy, because that would imply that they are not good mothers," Chanie continues. "And there is a lot of emphasis on appearance. The women are formal and neat and put together, but not chic, and do not express any individuality. And everyone monitors everyone else."

Gitty agrees and notes that when people come over to her home, she has to hide the books she reads in English (the language of the outside society) for fear that the women will talk about her as being "too modern;" such a designation could taint not only Gitty's reputation, but that of her family, negatively affecting relatives' marriage and job prospects. Gitty then tells me that whenever she has guests, she has to put away wedding photographs that show her daughter's hand on her husband's shoulder—a gesture of affection considered inappropriately intimate by community standards.

"And I still don't understand why I can't drive, why it's immodest," Gitty shrugs. "But that's what we believe. That's how it goes here, by us."

Gitty hides the books she reads in English. The women would talk about her as "too modern."

Chanie then tells me that she feels that she had her baby too young (at 19) and was robbed of her youth. Sometimes she resents it, even though she could have opted to wait; it was just that the peer and community pressure had been too great.

"And did you notice all of their 'Baruch Hashems'?" Gitty interrupts.

I had noticed them, though I was prepared; Hasidic people often say "Baruch Hashem"—"Thank God"—after they are asked how they are, or, indeed, when they are referring to anything positive in their lives; this functions as a hedge against the "evil eye."

"I have a real problem with that. If something is not going well, I admit it. I am honest," Gitty declares.

Indeed. My head is spinning. An hour ago I convinced myself that I would endeavor to see the lives of these women

Estie leaves her three kids with her sister and flirts with men at a bar.

DETAIL OF PAINTING BY BELLA BARAN

from their own perspectives, which, all in all, appeared to be quite positive; I was going to enlist them to help me understand and try to convey the richness of meaning which they saw and which endowed their day-to-day existence. But here is another perspective entirely, and I suspect that, while it might be less typical—or at least less openly articulated—it is no less important.

In the year since that dinner, I have spent hundreds of hours among people like Gitty and Chanie—Hasidim from various sects who, despite an attachment to the religion and certain elements of Hasidic culture, nonetheless feel oppressed by the community's rigid rules and social scrutiny, forced to lead all manner of double lives in order to pursue their individual needs and desires—which include things like seeing movies, listening to classical music, reading philosophy, or watching a ball game on TV. I have also met others who—for reasons ranging from a desire for more personal and intellectual freedom, to religious doubts, to the need to escape physical or sexual abuse—found it impossible to remain within this social structure and have taken the terrifying step of leaving the community, and sometimes the religion, altogether.

Significantly, however, the vast majority of these people—especially among the latter—have been men; out of the close to 70 people I have either spoken with, or know of, who have opted to leave Hasidic communities, no more than about 20 percent have been women.

When I ask Hasidim I have met about this gender difference, some claim it's because women have less of a desire to transgress or leave the community than men; they feel that the community's discouragement of female religious scholarship makes women less intellectually curious in general, and thus less likely to want to explore the world beyond community borders. Also, it is something of an open secret that many men in these communities see prostitutes and, because of this, others assume that the sexual motivations that often (though by no means exclusively) lead men to transgress do not exist for women, who, they feel, are "essentially" different in their sexual appetites. Obviously I don't fully buy these explanations.

I have noticed that the particular emphasis on female modesty, which holds women responsible for thwarting male sexual temptation, tends to make many Hasidic women appear more controlled in their behavior than their male counterparts. And the lack of knowledge about sexuality among most Hasidic young women (and, to a lesser degree, young men) is profound, with most unquestioningly accepting what they are taught about the differences between male and female sexuality.

Most of all, however, it is likely that women's primary responsibilities for the home and children, coupled with a double standard that sees a man's transgressions as more "forgivable" than a woman's, make even the thought of crossing boundaries both more remote, and riskier for women; without the time, and thus the opportunity, to explore the world beyond the community's symbolic walls, women also seem to have more to lose than men (custody of their children, their reputations and, often, sources of financial support) if they were to do so— all this, despite their overall greater proficiency in English and knowledge of the outside world, which is, ironically, a direct result of the community's understanding that women don't have the "right mind" for Torah study and thus can spend more time on English and basic math. Further, the nature of the Hasidic community dictates that most all "rebellion" be hidden and private, given the risks, this may be even more true for women, making it harder for someone like me to identify and speak with female transgressors (significantly, I was able to meet groups of Hasidic men who have created "safe" spaces in which to hang out outside the community).

Nonetheless, there are women who do take these risks, and some who actually leave. There is Layka, for example, the Satmar woman who, whenever she can get away, takes the subway to a Manhattan spa for a full-body massage, which, despite it being performed by a woman, flouts Hasidic standards of modesty and forces Layka to keep her visits secret. According to Layka, the Hasidic woman's obligation to bear and raise so many children, though joyfully embraced by most, can nonetheless be very difficult on the body (not to mention the spirit). This is rarely discussed openly, and the thought of seeking physical pleasure for its own sake is one most Hasidic

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women could not entertain without feeling dangerously immodest, or worse.

And then there is Estie, a divorced young Bobover woman who, once every few weeks, leaves her three kids with her unsuspecting sister and walks to the outskirts of her neighborhood to a bar run by Italians. Once there, she removes her wig, lights up a cigarette, and flirts with Tony, the muscular bartender who calls her "Estelle." Though it never goes anywhere beyond the bar (were she to be discovered in this non-Jewish establishment, mixing freely with gentiles and men, Estie's chances at remarriage in the community would evaporate), this flirtation is always a high point of Estie's week. Indeed, it is the only time men look her in the eye, and sometimes admiringly at other parts of her body; it is the only time Estie ever feels truly desired.

And then there is Breindel, another divorced woman who lives in the Satmar enclave of Kiryas Joel. Breindel keeps a television set hidden in her closet and, when her kids are asleep, she plugs it in and watches late into the night, dreaming of becoming a famous actress who wears glamorous clothes. Breindel's nearby neighbor, Chayla, not yet married and silently dreading it, sneaks off to the local library at least once a month where she devours romance novels and biographies, sometimes a whole book at one sitting.

While none of these women has expressed any intention to leave her community, there are others who, after much anguished consideration, have made the wrenching decision to do just that. Like the young woman from Crown Heights who, once a deeply religious girl, began having serious doubts after high school. While her religious questions ultimately sparked a fervent desire to attend college (which she ultimately did), she feels that it was a tour of the women's mikvah that crystallized her desire to leave the community altogether; more alarming than the specific sights she saw on that tour was what the mikvah represented—namely, the impending loss of control over her 19-year-old body to her future husband and the inevitable children that she would be expected to produce, effectively ending all possibility of indulging her burgeoning curiosity about herself and the world.

And the woman from Boro Park who, after suffering years of abuse from a husband who routinely visited prostitutes, finally got the strength to leave him and the community; living with her two children on welfare, she keeps the commandments for the kids' sake (she is no longer sure she believes), though she now wears pants and leaves her hair uncovered. She is looking for paid work and dreaming of the day she might be able to get her GED so she can apply to community college. Her close friend, another divorced woman originally from Williamsburg, has also left her abusive husband and the community. Since leaving, she has become lesbian-identified, though made the point of telling me that it was only after she left the community that she understood this about herself; among her Hasidic friends, the absence of sexual pleasure within marriage was common enough that she thought her feelings were normal. Despite leaving the community, she has remained observant in her own way, recently deciding that she would like to become a rabbi.

And then there is the young Lubavitch woman, whose experience of sexual abuse at the hands of a prominent rabbi also led her to leave the community that not only failed to protect her from the abuse, but, even more troubling, tried to cover it up when it was brought to light. She credits the violin, which she has been learning to play since she left the community, with saving her life; despite her life-long love of classical music, growing up she was repeatedly told that listening to it, not to mention playing it, would damage her soul, "infecting" it with the corrupt souls of non-Jewish composers. Now she listens and plays as many hours as she can.

For each of these women, making the difficult decision to leave the Hasidic community was informed by a sobering knowledge of the potentially devastating personal and social consequences of such a choice. All faced the prospect (and, in some cases, the reality) of losing their family's love and support, being rejected by friends and other members of the community, and, if they are parents, the possibility of losing contact with their children. Many fought—and continue to grapple with—the guilt of bringing hurt and shame upon their families,

Crossing the boundaries—and exploring the world—is risker for women.

and of rejecting a community and a way of life for which many of their ancestors died rather than give up. And each has had to face, often alone, the formidable obstacles to creating a life outside of the community, as a lack of secular education and credentials, and a general ignorance of how the outside society operates, constantly threaten to undermine their success in the secular world.

Even given these obstacles, however, the women who'd left ultimately felt they had no choice. And, despite their having become "immigrants" into the surrounding, secular society, they have found that the quintessentially American process of acculturation and self-reinvention is rarely complete and always ambivalent, accompanied by an inevitable sense of loss. Like all of us, they retain the imprint of their upbringing; the way they understand and act in the world was, of course, profoundly shaped by the values and traditions of the life they chose to leave. And so, rather than shed their Hasidic identities, many who leave find ways, often even subconsciously, to bring aspects of that life— a warm spirit of community, a clear involvement in tikkun olam, an interest in mysticism and Jewish spirituality—into the new lives that they make (and are always in the process of remaking) as they move forward.

Hella Winston is a sociologist living in New York City. Her forthcoming book, *Unchosen*, about people struggling to live within or leave their ultra-Orthodox communites, will be published by Beacon Press in the fall of 2005.

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Seeking a Way Out

It's Different for Men and Women

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by Lynn Davidman

Leah, an articulate, outspoken, professional 40-year-old woman, left her Hasidic family and community at the age of 19. While her brothers had received a very intensive, serious education, Leah, like other girls in her community, went to a school where she was taught "'Judaism lite.' We just learned the Torah over and over and over again. There was no Talmud at all. And, they taught us only their particular interpretation of the Torah and did not expose us to the entire real thing. I think when I finally read the story of Tamar [who, in *Genesis 38*, disguises herself as a prostitute and sleeps with her father-in-law] I was like, 'Oh my God, I can't believe this!"

When Leah was seven or eight, she was told that she could no longer go with her father to the little *shtieblach*, the small, intimate synagogues, often located in homes, which she had so enjoyed. "Once I could no longer go with my father, I did not go at all. My mother would make me set the table or just do stuff around the house and it was boring and stupid. At that point, my participation in religion ended." As Leah grew into adolescence, the attention she received in her household diminished. "My mother felt that the boys were more important. She was more proud to have them. When I was younger, I sat next to my father on Shabbos—I was the eldest—but when my brothers were getting bigger, they sat next to him. And all of a sudden, the focus became getting them to shul on time, their *davening* [praying], their education. Although I did well in school, it just did not matter."

By the time her brothers became bar mitzvah, the excitement over their lives revealed the ordinariness of hers as a girl: "I felt alone, and could not find my place at that time... I'm a young woman, but I don't want to do the women's role. I don't want to be like my mother and not go to shul so I can stay home and cook....There was just no place for me in the religious world!" This response was reinforced when, as a high school student, she discovered Ibsen's "A Doll's House." "I had found *my* book!"

During her teenage years, "I was talking, you know, liberation. They wanted girls to just shut up, look pretty and get married. And I was saying stuff like, 'But why? Why should *we* do the dishes?' And this talk became disturbing to everybody and I just felt compelled; I could not stop my feelings, though my life would have been simpler if I could have....It just became claustrophobic .Eventually I stopped observing Shabbos altogether." Within a few years she married a man who was also rebelling, and together they moved out and began to live secular lives.

Chaim, an intense and intellectual man, left the Lubavitch Hasidic world of his upbringing in his early twenties. "I was an autodidact. I taught myself to read English at the age of five. I would sneak away to the library; I learned about the world through books. Philosophy and science were my ultimate passions and interests. I suppose in Morristown [the location of his all-male Lubavitch yeshiva], when I skipped class to go read what I liked, I had something of an experience of rationality. So at age 17 I reached a certain point where I could not reconcile what I was reading in the library with what I was studying in the yeshiva....I saw that there really is no absolute truth. It was like I ascended the ladder of reason."

Like many other men who left the *Haredi* (ultra-Orthodox) world, Chaim also spoke about trying to reconcile his natural adolescent impulses for sexual self-exploration with the rabbi's exhortations about Judaism's stringent prohibitions against masturbation. "I'm supposed to feel guilty about all of this... that I had my body, I had my natural urges, and they were telling me that this is wrong. This self-abnegation in the doctrines of the Lubavitch made me feel terrible about myself and reinforced my sense that this world was a mental and physical ghetto whose boundaries I had to escape."

Girls and women have a different experience. Unlike Chaim, Leah and the other women I interviewed did not describe feeling guilty because they wanted to masturbate and were explicitly forbidden to do so. As Leah expostulated: "...from the sexuality point of view, you are just repressed.

Male scholarship, male sexual urges. And female ignorance.

There's just nothing happening. O.K. I mean, you're not...your vagina's never given a name. Like nothing...you're just like you don't have anything. O.K., or they have something, and that's it. They don't even tell you don't have anything. Their ideas about women's modesty and their failure to talk to us at all made me so just so shy and embarrassed!"

Leah's and Chaim's stories reflect themes that came up repeatedly in interviews. The *Haredi* community's very distinct roles and expectations for women and men created obvious gender differences in the ways people exited from the Haredi worlds. Chaim had, as a male, been encouraged to excel as a scholar, and he applied these skills to secular knowledge; ironically, the emphasis on male immersion in text study precipitated his exit. Leah, in contrast, angrily described her growing realization that she was denied all the highly valued opportunities for learning and public ritual behavior that were available to men. The emphasis on modesty produced women who experienced not an adolescence of sexual frustration, but rather one of ignorance about their bodies. And, consistent with the emphasis on marriage as the central goal of a young woman's life, Leah found a similarly disenchanted man who became her segue into the secular world. For both men and women, the communities' emphasis on gender role expectations ironically provided the leavers with their pathways out of the community. ●

Lynn Davidman, a Professor of Judaic Studies and American Studies at Brown University is currently working on a book titled *On Leaving Orthodoxy*, about women and men in Israel and the U.S. who have left Haredi and modern Orthodox communities.

Scrupulosity

ALAIN TRAIG

Say there's a 12-year-old girl in the midst of preparing for her bat mitzvah. She has begun to pray regularly, has taken to chanting psalms and reading from the Torah, and is trying to keep kosher in a home where Jewish dietary law aren't even a serious consideration.

You might consider this girl a refreshing affirmation of the power of Judaism, a tonic to the prevailing pessimism over the health and wellbeing of Jewish life. In Jennifer Traig's case, though, these laudable behaviors were symptoms of mental illness.

"Sometimes I had to drop to my knees and pray during student council meetings, and sometimes I had to hide under the bleachers and chant psalms," Traig writes at the beginning of her new memoir, *Devil in the Details: Scenes from an Obsessive Girlhood* (Little, Brown).

It wasn't until several years later—during which time she tossed out magazines at Passover because there were pictures of leavened food on the cover, didn't bathe for the three weeks leading up to Tisha B'av, and conducted lengthy Shabbat services alone in her bedroom—not until the end of her teen years, in fact, that Traig was diagnosed with and treated for a form of obsessive-compulsive disorder called scrupulosity, which she describes as "a hyper-religious form" of OCD.

Jennifer Traig wanted to be a good Jewish girl. Somewhere along the way her religious convictions were hijacked by her compulsions.

Scrupulosity made her both entertaining and irritating to her parents and younger sister, while completely absorbing Jennifer. Experts say that up to three percent of the population has OCD at some point in their lives, and 10 percent of these suffer from scrupulosity as part of their condition. The illness doesn't favor women over men, but in Traig's case it was accompanied by anorexia.

Scrupulosity bears an eerie resemblance to observant Judaism, with its outward focus on choreographed ritual, notes Traig, now 34 and long recovered. But her experience raises questions. What is piety? And where is the line that separates it from pathology?

For Traig, her adolescent self felt no freedom to ignore her religious impulses, even if she didn't know exactly how to act on them. To do so would have been an affront to God.

"I'm definitely someone who needs a lot of structure," she told Lilith. "And if I don't have it, I'll invent it. So, with Judaism, I just had no idea, so I made things up—like from Neil Diamond's movie 'The Jazz Singer'. Trying to extrapolate to my own life."

The Traigs were living in Woodland, then a rural backwater in California's Sacramento valley, where her father, a surgeon, had come to work after his medical residency. Alain Traig was an assimilated Jew; his wife, Judith, a practicing Catholic who initially agreed to suppress her religious observance and raise their two daughters as Jews. Even among the Baptists and evangelicals of Jew-bereft Woodland, Jennifer maintained a strong Jewish identity.

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by David Holzel

But lacking Jewish knowledge, the pork-loving Traigs had no context in which to place Jennifer's increasingly obsessive Jewish behavior. To them, not touching the lights on Shabbat was as bizarre a ritual as those Jennifer created to answer her compulsions. Her bat mitzvah lessons with elderly Mr. Stein only enlarged the territory in which her scrupulosity could run riot.

"Mr. Stein did not know, when he told me that milk and meat required separate dishes, that I would decide that they required separate toilets as well," she writes in the bemused tone she maintains throughout her book. Thanks to scrupulosity, such obsessive-compulsive rituals as incessant hand-washing became, she says, "just that—rituals." The intrusive thoughts and relentless ruminations on theological matters—which lend scrupulosity the nickname "the doubting disease"—all but paralyzed her. "The impulses themselves were not religious at all," she explains. "They took on that framework. But they could have been anything. Because religion was something I had always been interested in, that was the shape it took for me."

"OCD tends to hit you in the things that you care about," says Carol E. Watkins, a psychiatrist at Northern County Psychiatric Associates in Maryland.

Everyone has intrusive thoughts, says Jonathan D. Huppert, assistant professor of psychology in psychiatry at the University of Pennsylvania's Center for the Treatment and Study of Anxiety. "But most people with OCD tend to respond to intrusive thoughts with fear. They fight the fear with rituals....The thoughts appear to prove that they are bad people."

The fear of God does exist as a concept in Judaism, adds Huppert, an Orthodox Jew who has treated observant Jews with scrupulosity and has conducted research on the condition. "But it's not supposed to be a fear that makes you paralyzed in your functioning." For both Huppert and Watkins, the line dividing piety from pathology is where faith becomes distress and impairs a person's ability to function.

"People with scrupulosity might feel they have to say a particular prayer just right," Watkins says. "So they might make their family sit while they start the prayer over and over again."

"You know it's pathological if you're focusing on one or two commandments to the exclusion of everything else," Traig says. "You'll violate Shabbat to shower because you think you've incurred a ritual impurity. There were a couple of things that were very important for me to observe, but other things I really didn't care about." Keeping ritually clean was one. But she had no qualms about lying to her parents in an effort to conceal her condition, she says.

As Traig neared the end of high school, she began meeting with her synagogue's new rabbi to learn to distinguish normative Judaism from her own improvisations. She also went into therapy to give her compulsions a reality check. "For me the process was more or less what is called cognitive behavior therapy. A lot of making me do things that I didn't think I could do, and proving that it would not kill me," she says.

Today Traig lives in San Francisco. She is a writer, and an Orthodox Jew. And although she knew lots of girls in high school with anorexia, she says she has never met another person who has suffered from scrupulosity. The publication of her memoir could change that.

The pork-loving Traigs had no context in which to place Jennifer's increasingly obsessive Jewish behavior.

She says she now feels the freedom to resist the impulses "that jump unbidden into my brain." But naming her condition and treating it was a mixed blessing.

"You do lose the magic. It's not God telling you to do this," she says. "On the other hand, I think it makes the equation much less scary. A sufferer, with the help of therapy, [can] have a religious life governed by choices and not by psychiatric imperative."

David Holzel is a writer in Maryland. He is the creator of the webzine The Jewish Angle.

Genetics & BREAST CANCER

What's a Jewish Woman to Do?

by Shala Erlich

By now, many of us have learned that the Ashkenazi Jewish population carries genetic mutations that drastically increase the risk of breast and ovarian cancer. But what does that mean for a Jewish woman whose grandmother, aunt, and mother have had these cancers? What does it mean for an Ashkenazi woman newly diagnosed with breast cancer? What does it mean for me, a doctor, a descendent of Polish and Ukrainian Jews, a mother of a two-year-old daughter, and someone whose own mother was diagnosed with breast cancer at 43, two months before my brother's bar mitzvah?

Sharsheret ("chain" in Hebrew), an organization which pairs young Jewish women facing breast cancer, or at high risk for cancer, with others who have had similar experiences, hosted a breast cancer genetics symposium this October in New York City to parse out some of these questions. Physicians, social workers, a genetic counselor, a documentary-maker, and a veterinarian-turned-patient-advocate pooled their knowledge and experiences to shed light on the buzzing cloud of questions and worries that swirl around this issue. Most, if not all, of the presenters were Jewish, and their frequent use of "we" and "us" fostered the sense that patients, family members, and "experts" are all in this together.

Women born Jewish share this health problem because we are genetically part of the larger Jewish family tree. Dr. Ruth Oratz, an oncologist with an appointment at New York University School of Medicine who practices in Colorado, traced the Askenazi, Sephardi, and Middle Eastern branches and the origins of the different mutations within the family tree. She

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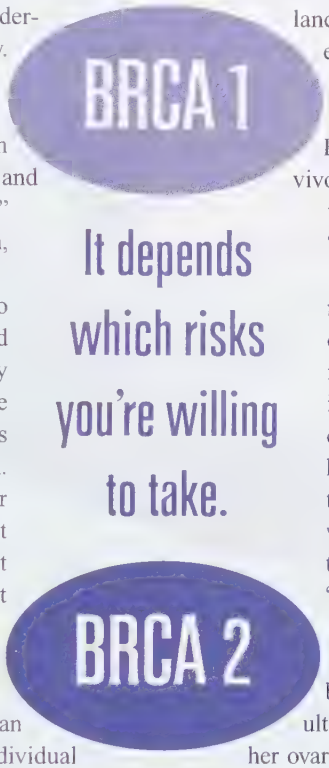
explained that genetic mutations became concentrated among Jews thanks to historical and cultural factors that rendered our community cohesive, isolated, and small.

Other researchers presented the latest epidemiological and genetics research, including results from The New York Breast Cancer Study which investigated BRCA1 and BRCA2 mutations in New York-area Ashkenazi women newly diagnosed with breast cancer, and in their families. My own mother, raised in New York's Westchester county, could have been one of the women in this study: one in 10 of them had a gene mutation; 50 percent of those, like my mother, had little or no family history. (Maybe I should call my doctor about that MRI…) The slides flashed up with statistics on lifetime risks of cancer, family trees, and recommendations for genetic testing, surveillance, and preventive measures (see sidebar). The medical information, full of jargon and technical details, takes concentration and thoughtful explanations to understand, but it has a certain hard-edged solidity. Other presenters focused on the troubling, murkier, "psychosocial" dimensions: the emotional and ethical dilemmas facing both women making the decision whether or not to get tested and the many uncertainties facing "pre-vivors," women who have tested positive for a mutation, but who have not developed cancer…yet.



From a medical standpoint, the goal is to identify women who carry the mutations and help them do whatever they can to prevent, delay onset, and catch the cancer early so that it can be treated more successfully. "Knowledge is power," said a physician during the symposium. The more a woman knows about her genes, her risks, and her medical surveillance and treatment options, the better. Makes sense. But that doesn't mean that deciding to get tested, or figuring out what to do with the results, is straightforward.

Unfortunately, the knowledge we have from medical science is still insufficient, and this means that knowledge may bring more harm than good. Consider the limitations, for any individual woman, of population-based statistics. A woman who learns she carries a BRCA1 or BRCA2 mutation knows she has an 80 percent risk of developing breast cancer, but it isn't a 100 percent risk. Is it worth undergoing a bilateral mastectomy before any cancer is present or even suspected, even though she might be one of the 20 percent who never will get cancer? The concept of risk includes not just statistical probabilities but also each woman's emotional response to those numbers.

Living with an inherited cancer predisposition brings out questions we all face, but often prefer to push out of our minds. How do we avoid becoming overwhelmed by fear of future illness or death? What kind of steps are we willing to take in hopes of some peace of mind?

Much of the clutching dread we feel when considering this topic comes from the way breast and ovarian cancer affect the parts of our body that literally and psychologically link us to the people closest to us: our sexual partners and our children. The idea of cutting out vital parts of our body, or suffering potentially lethal disease of those parts, is a deep threat to our fertility and sexuality. Dr. Oratz reassured the symposium audience that most women with the genetic mutation who have not yet developed cancer can wait to have their ovaries removed until after childbearing, and can often put off mastectomies until after breastfeeding. All too often, doctors have dismissed and dispatched women's breasts, ovaries, and uteruses as optional organs. But it is no easy thing to say goodbye to the breasts your children suckled and your lover caressed or the ovaries, source of your eggs, even when their utilitarian functions are past.

This brings us back to the surgical solutions offered to pre-vivors. The evidence shows that removal of both breasts and ovaries will prevent cancer in *most* cases. Not exactly the miracle cure we were hoping for. And yet each pre-vivor must make this hard decision: incorporate intensive surveillance for cancer into her life, hoping to catch it early if it appears, or undergo prophylactic surgery. Dr. Susan Friedman, who founded and heads FORCE: Facing Our Risk of Cancer Empowered, came up with the label "pre-vivors" to better describe these women, for whom the medical term, inaccurate and dismissive, is "unaffected carriers."

Tara Freundlich, a mother of two, whose mother and grandmother both died in their 50s of breast cancer, and whose maternal aunt died in her 40s of ovarian cancer, "knew the women in my family didn't get old: they died." She put off getting tested for the mutations, because she had already made up her mind to get prophylactic mastectomies if she tested positive, and she wasn't ready to face that. But at 46, the day the tech performing her annual mammogram said "We need some more pictures," a wave of fear passed over her, and she started berating herself for not acting sooner. She called her sister, they both went in to see a genetic counselor, and she ultimately tested positive for BRCA2. She's had her ovaries removed, a bilateral mastectomy, and breast reconstruction. "My body image is good—I think my body looks better than it has in years," she says. The hardest part is her lack of desire, due to her low hormone levels. Once her husband entices her, she says, sex is just as good as ever, but the desire never occurs to her ahead of time, and she misses that. On the whole, she emphasizes, she views her surgeries positively: "For the first time in my life I envision myself getting old."

Nina Allen, a 49-year-old musician, whose mother recently died of ovarian cancer, and who has a BRCA2 mutation, decided to get a prophylactic oophorectomy, removal of the ovaries. This turned out to be much easier than she expected: "they just popped those little babies out through a little peep-hole." She had almost no side effects and feels her peace of mind is priceless. But she has decided to rely on continued surveillance of her breasts, through a study at a major medical center, rather than getting mastectomies. "There is so much I can do for testing, I feel like I don't have to be that drastic." But not everyone

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feels the same. Another woman, who is planning to undergo bilateral mastectomy, isn't willing to watch and wait, "Tamoxifen and worry are not for me." Both Tara and Nina expressed the wish that their mothers could have had access to prophylactic surgeries.

The issue of inherited breast cancer raises other concerns that have particular weight in Jewish values. Locating the source of the problem in our genes evokes memories from the Holocaust and other times in history when we have been accused of having "bad genes" or tainted bloodlines, as Dr. Stewart Fleishman, director of cancer supportive services at Beth Israel Medical Center in New York, reminded the audience. The genetic source of the disease also brings family relationships to the fore, linking us to the generations above and below us, and to our siblings. For example, Beth Murphy, the documentary filmmaker, recounted the story of four sisters whose mother had died of ovarian cancer. The women disagreed about whether to get tested, but they would all be affected if any of the sisters tested positive. Other presenters discussed common concerns about the impact on the next generation. So much of Jewish tradition focuses on what we transmit to our heirs that many women feel guilt toward their children for passing on to them a booby-trapped genetic legacy.

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Just for the Record

There is no evidence of any link between abortion and breast cancer. This is the conclusion of scientific reviews by the National Cancer Institute and the leading British medical journal, the Lancet. (To view the NCI report, go to http://www.cancer.gov/cancerinfo/ere-workshop-report). Flouting the scientific evidence, government-issued brochures warning that abortion increases the risk of breast cancer are given to women considering abortion during mandatory waiting periods in several states, according to the Associated Press.

Karen Malec, president of the Coalition on Abortion/Breast Cancer, whose mission is to spread the abortion-cancer myth under the guise of "educating and providing information on abortion as a risk factor for breast cancer," has the chutzpah to call the National Cancer Institute's conclusions a "perversion of science by politics." Please help spread the scientifically sound facts, and fight back against misinformation that unnecessarily frightens women facing, or looking back on, a weighty choice. You can make an impact by contacting your state and federal representatives to express your concern about this issue and by supporting pro-choice organizations, such as NARAL and Planned Parenthood.

The Facts, Ma'am

- Only 10% of breast cancer is due to inherited predisposition. Much of inherited breast cancer among Jews has been attributed to three mutations in the BRCA1 and BRCA2 genes.
- When the BRCA1 gene mutates, loss of its normal function can lead to uncontrolled overgrowth of cancerous cells.
- The BRCA1 and BRCA2 mutations can be inherited from your mother or your father. They are present in men and women equally, but increase men's cancer risk much less.
- In the general population, women have a 12% lifetime risk of breast cancer, but women with BRCA1 or BRCA2 mutations have an 80% lifetime risk of breast cancer. For ovarian cancer, the lifetime risks are 2% (general population), 40-65% (BRCA1 mutation-carriers), or 20% (BRCA2 mutation-carriers).
- Among of Ashkenazi Jews, 2 to 2.5% carry one of these mutations. This is 5 to 6 times as common as in the general population.
- Little is known about how common these mutations are, but there is some evidence that the BRCA1 mutation is also present in Sephardi and Middle Eastern Jews.
- No federal law adequately protects against employer and insurance discrimination for mutation-carriers.
- In addition to Sharsheret, good resources for information and emotional support include FORCE: Facing Our Risk of Cancer Empowered (http://www.facing ourrisk.org) and Breast Cancer Action (http://www.bcaction.org).

Should YOU get genetic counseling and testing?

Your risk of carrying a mutation is higher if you are of Ashkenazi Jewish descent, if you have more than one close relative with a history of breast or ovarian cancer, if you or your relatives developed cancer before the age of 50, or if you or any of your relatives have had breast cancer in both breasts, or the same person has had both breast and ovarian cancer. Although very specific criteria exist for BRCA1/BRCA2 testing (http://www.nccn.org), your own level of concern is a good indication for deciding to pursue genetic counseling.

What if you test positive for a mutation?

- Increased surveillance, including monthly self breast exams, quarter- or semi-annual physical exams, and yearly mammograms, MRIs, ultrasound evaluations and blood tests to screen for ovarian cancer. The most effective methods and frequency of surveillance are actively being researched. For recent, detailed recommendations, refer to the National Comprehensive Cancer Network (http://www.nccn.org).
- Ask about chemoprevention, for example a drug like tamoxifen which may help prevent cancer.
- Consider lifestyle changes even before any signs of cancer: improving exercise, diet, and tobacco and alcohol habits. The NY Breast Cancer Study found that regular exercise and a healthy weight during adolescence and young adulthood delayed the onset of cancer in women with the mutations.

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For This I Went to Rabbinical School

by Jill Jacobs

I am standing in torrential rain outside of the home of one of Chicago's alderman. I have come here, along with two hundred area residents, to protest the lack of weekend subway, or "El," service in several low-income neighborhoods. Upset that the alderman failed to appear at a community meeting about the train situation, we have moved the meeting to his home, in the hopes that he will at least acknowledge our complaint.

While all other branches of the El run twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, the branch serving the low-income and minority communities of Pilsen, Little Village and North Lawndale, stops running at midnight during the week and does not run at all on Saturdays and Sundays. This lack of late-night and weekend El service, combined with the infrequency of bus service in the neighborhood, makes it virtually impossible for residents to commute to second and third-shift or weekend jobs, or to reach the public library, city parks, museums, or hospitals during the weekend.

In the course of the campaign to secure weekend and late-night el service for these neighborhoods, I have ridden the trains at 7AM to survey riders about their needs, spoken to residents about the difficulties of living without daily service, and attended press conferences and city council meetings about the situation.

When did we learn *this* in rabbinical school?

When people first hear that I am a rabbi, they immediately ask where my congregation is. When I explain that I work not with a congregation, but with the Jewish Council on Urban Affairs, the oldest Jewish social justice organization in the country, they generally look confused and ask, "So, you didn't want to work as a rabbi?"

For me, however, the work that I am doing is very clearly rabbinic. My studies at the Jewish Theological Seminary and elsewhere have imbued in me a passion for text and a belief in the ability of classical Jewish sources to help us to understand the world. My commitment to the halakhic (Jewish legal) system, which makes demands and imposes obligations, forces me to take Jewish civil law as seriously as I take the commandments to observe Shabbat, to *daven,* or to keep kosher. As such, rabbinical school did, in fact, teach me to be an activist.

Some of my classmates have dedicated their rabbinates to helping their communities find meaning in prayer, develop personal ritual practices, or deepen their Jewish learning. I have taken on the equally "religious" task of personally responding to the call for action that I find in our texts, trying to resurrect an oft-neglected system of civil law, and helping others to make social justice a conscious part of their Jewish practice and Judaism a conscious part of their activism.

The voices of wisdom that emerge from our texts and the voices of real people in our communities can and must be brought into dialogue with one another. I cannot possibly understand Jewish laws prohibiting landlords from prematurely evicting tenants until I meet public housing residents frightened that they will become homeless if the Chicago Housing Authority succeeds in its efforts to demolish all public housing high rises. I cannot understand Talmudic discussions of workers' poverty until I witness the desperation of day laborers waiting to be hired. And I cannot understand the biblical insistence on equality until I see neighborhoods denied basic city services.

I cannot understand Talmudic discussions of poverty until I witness the desperatio of day laborers.

The Jewish Council on Urban Affairs takes seriously the call of these texts, and therefore dedicates itself to making Chicago a better place for its residents. By partnering with grassroots community groups, advocating for more just legislation, and offering no-interest loans to community groups developing low-income housing, JCUA translates into action the obligations, outlined in classical Jewish texts, to create a fair and just society.

And so, driven by my understanding of Jewish law and inspired by JCUA's forty years of activism, I allow myself to be drenched by another of Chicago's endless summer storms. The rabbinate I have chosen demands no less.

Rabbi Jill Jacobs is the Director of Outreach and Education for the Jewish Council on Urban Affairs, which is based in Chicago.

Vertigo

a short story by Karen Paul-Stern

The vertigo came early this year, catching her by surprise. She wasn't expecting the achiness in her bones and the swirl of her head until about a month later, when the actual anniversary was upon her. But the moon's cycles pulled her down like a tide. And one night she sat at dinner and suddenly felt dizzy.

Her first thought, as she gripped the edge of the table and watched the saltshaker spin, was that she might have a brain tumor, which would not be a pleasant matter ordinarily, but compared to the grief that had wracked her body and that was haunting her now like a lost limb, it would have been easier to face a more certain physical crisis. When she realized what was overtaking her, she understood from experience that for a while the world would be out of focus.

As she lay down with a cold washcloth across her forehead, she mused on the mysteries of the Jewish lunar calendar—the ever-shifting days giving no hint as to their arrival each year. Yet Shabbat arrives every Friday and the seasons are defined by wonderful traditions—the Passover seder heralds spring and Hanukkah candles are designed to brighten the darkest days of winter. There is an ever-present rhythm that quietly leads to the next celebration.

She thought about how much she looked forward to Friday nights. She was able to arrange her work schedule so that she could leave early on Friday afternoons to pick up her girls so that together they shop for the chicken, challah, flowers and fruit for the table. And the three of them go home and she jiggles her younger daughter on her hip as they dance around the dining room table and they set out the tzedakah cup, the kiddush cup, the challah plate and the candlesticks – three sets, one for each of her two girls, and one for the baby boy, had he lived. Their dancing, too, is rhythmic, circular, and as they lay

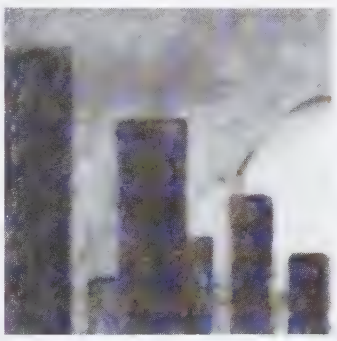
ILLUSTRATION BY LAUREN SHAHROODY WWW.SHAHROODY.COM

out each separate item for the Shabbat table, she always notices how it mimicks her daily life, compartmentalized pieces that come together to form a whole. If one ritual item is missing, it would not really be Shabbat.

But there is no preparation for the arrival of yahrzheit—the anniversary of death. It approaches differently, it sneaks up on a person more quietly. Its timing is unclear from year to year. And while it does not fall on the modern anniversary date of the passing, the moon pulls your body in and you can sense it coming, in an ancient atavistic way.

Two years ago at this time she was in bed, cross-stitching the baby's name. They hadn't told anyone any of their children's names before they were born, so this felt like tempting fate, but the nurses in the hospital were so engaged in her life and this baby that she felt at liberty to tell them, as if it could possibly tempt the fates because none of this could possibly be real anyway. The water breaking at 27 weeks, the bedrest, the bedpans, the hospital, the boredom, terror and finally, the zen sense of complacency.

Her friends called and came to visit religiously. Her husband and her older daughter...back when she was the oldest and only child and couldn't wait for the baby to arrive...came several



She was his mother but she couldn't protect him.

times a week, bringing her newspapers and magazines and mail and gossip from school and the neighborhood. Her favorite times were when they had just left, although she loved to see them, as she was relieved that there was quiet again and she had a stack of newspapers and crossword puzzles that would sustain her for at least a day. She vowed not to turn on the television until the evenings so that its soporific qualities would not force her into a nap during the day—she wouldn't sleep well at night if that happened.

There is no good sleep to be had this night either. Her younger daughter cries out, and she tiptoes into her room at three AM to check on her. She never goes back to sleep. Tossing and turning, she feels the familiar phantom cramps on her lower left side, as she had in every pregnancy. Her demons circle around her head, projecting snapshots of the tiny casket, the cold rainy day, her mother's arms resting on her shoulders as the rabbi invoked the kaddish. She shivers in her bed, reminded of the sweaty nights of half sleep where she couldn't shake the vision of her baby being cold, so cold, underground.

When the dawn breaks, she is curled up under the covers, cheeks tear-stained and breathing heavily. Her husband lumbers out of bed, unaware of the long night behind her. She rolls over and blinks, not sure if she can actually pull out of bed and into the day ahead. She notices that even after two years, her first few minutes out of bed are difficult, her ankles and joints not quite limber enough to hold her weight. When she first got up from her two months of bedrest, when they were trying to induce labor, finally, and get the baby out, her legs crumbled underneath her, the strength had been so sapped from her body.

The alarm clock rings, snapping her out of the fog of the night before. She knows that within five minutes, her body will lurch into autodrive, and she will get the girls up, fix breakfasts and lunches and get everyone out the door on time. It isn't her home life, where every second is accounted for, that suffered from this now-annual juggernaut. It is at the office, where she is, ironically, more in control of her time, that she has less control over her body and its almost spastic response to the anniversary. She knows that she will be unable to focus clearly on anything, and even though there are projects to complete and staff to manage, she will need to close her office door and give in to the shivers that will accompany the dizziness, both taking up residence in her body.

He would have been two years old. Sometimes, when she walks past the playground on her way home from work, she sees the neighbor from around the corner who had had a baby at the same time. She watches the little boy toddling up the jungle gym and down the slide. It was harder before she had the third child, her little girl, who now devours all her air and breath and time and fills up empty spaces with her enormous presence. But sometimes passing the playground makes her shake inside. She'll hear the little boy's squeals as he slides down the slide, and all she can think is that his lungs are healthy, he can breathe.

They thought that their baby could breathe too, once he was delivered. Her fluid had been low, but never too low, and since his heartbeat had been so very strong, everyone held out the hope that he would be fine. No, it wasn't even hope. It was a quiet assurance—the doctor and the nurses all felt that he was certainly a keeper. And then he was born, and for the first hour, everything was perfect. He was out, he was breathing, and she was allowed to sit up again for the first time in two months. Then, dizzyingly, he was in the neo-natal ICU, he was being rushed in the middle of the night to the children's hospital so that he could be placed on a special heart and lung machine and then they were standing next to his little head, which was swollen and red from all the medicine, hearing the doctor say that there was no chance, there was a bleed and he had to be removed from the machine, the god-like machine that had been helping him breathe just a few days more, please just a few days more so that his lungs could develop and work on their own but no, he had to be taken off the machine and then he died. In their arms. He was five days old. It was the first time she had held him since he was born.

Two years later, she can still feel how her own lungs constricted when she first laid eyes on the baby casket as it lifted out of the hearse at the cemetery. And thinking about how cold he was going to be underground. The thought kept her up for days. And finally, letting go of it, of him, she was his mother but she couldn't protect him from the cold, she would just have

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to find a way to live with that for the rest of her life. It has been this, this act of keeping his brief life in her heart and mind that has transformed her spiritually.

This morning, however, spirituality is not on her menu. She has a big presentation at work, one that she and her staff have worked on for weeks. Once she arrives at the office, she settles into her morning routine, the minutes tick by, one o'clock comes and goes, and despite her lack of lucidity, the meeting goes well. She has the luxury now of two weeks on the horizon without any projects that demand a public appearance. Good. She thinks that maybe by then the fog will blow out to sea.

Sometimes she misses the cocoon-like warmth of the hospital room. It's a bittersweet memory, for as certainly as she never wants to be confined again, she also remembers the innocence of those months. Before she knew what it was like to sleepwalk during the day. To bury a child. To be the bereaved. Sometimes she misses those early days of mourning. When it was okay to be completely wrapped up in the sensations of loss. Today, sitting at a conference table, it's no longer publicly acceptable to be dwelling on the past. But her body tells her otherwise, the lure of the tide is too strong. She realizes that the challenge is to learn how to mimic living a quotidian life knowing that your life is anything but, and that you will never again be able to walk down the street without the searing memory of pain.

She needs to see healthy and happy babies.

Everyone has left the conference room. Alone again, the memories are flooding faster. She tries to catch her breath, to find a center in her dizziness. She grabs onto the back of a chair and takes several deep breaths. She needs to get out of the office, to feel the physical touch of external elements, of sunshine, of children.

She drags her meeting paraphernalia back to her office, dashes off a quick congratulatory e-mail to her staff and tells them that she has a family emergency and will be out for the rest of the day. She walks to her car, gets in, and tries to decide where to go. The cemetery is too intangible, a surprise visit to her husband too laden with a minefield of miscommunication. She realizes that she wants to go back to the hospital, to see babies in the nursery, to be reminded that in the real world, most babies are born and are healthy and happy. In the surreal world of neonatal loss, you walk into a support group room and it feels like nothing can ever be whole again because all you can hear and know and taste in that room is babies and death. That's not what she wants to feel today, not even as her body is betraying her and reminding her with every step that her life is now defined by loss.

She arrives at the hospital and as the sliding doors open, she inhales its sterility and the too-familiar scent of clean linens. She reaches the third floor and walks over to the nursery window, where her daughter would always run first "to see the babies" when they would visit her, and she peeks in. Today, there are no babies. With no new life inside, the nursery looks desolate. She can feel the disappointment and utter fatigue curling their way up her body.

The nurse who had changed her sheets every day for seven weeks spies her, and cocks her head at her, as if to search for an alternate meaning. Then the nurse obviously remembers, and horrifyingly, walks over to her, and she knows that the question is coming because it is clear from the nurse's expansive smile that she had never learned what had happened.

"How's my baby?!," the nurse booms. Her heart lurches, she paints the sad smile that has become so familiar and says, shaking her head, "He didn't make it." The nurse, well-trained, clucks her teeth and offers her condolences, two years too late, and continues on her rounds. She stands with the sad smile frozen on her face, and then turns to leave.

It takes a while for the smile to come unglued, and for her jaw to stop aching. As she drives home, she is not sure she can face the burden of an evening at home, with its noise and its simple but exhausting routine. As she puts her key in the lock, she hears the girls' laughter out in the back and her husband in the kitchen beginning to prepare dinner. And then she sees the candle.

The *yahrzheit* candle has been placed in the middle of the dining room table and is already lit, defiantly, as the sun has not yet set. It flickers as she opens the front door and a slight breeze circles the room, like a spirit. At that moment she realizes that her husband, too, must be remembering, even though they hadn't discussed it, even though the date on calendar doesn't match the date in their hearts and minds. Perhaps he noticed that she was frenzied, out of sorts. Or maybe it was a just a date he marked in his book. She can imagine him, many months earlier, looking up the *yahrzheit* date on the perpetual calendar given to them by the funeral home, marking it in his own calendar with his precise handwriting. And then opening the book this week to discover that they needed a candle. No physical aches to remind him. No phantom pain. Just an otherwise unremarkable day made remarkable by a memory.

She sinks into the easy chair, and focuses on the flame. She quietly realizes that her body had not been betraying her today after all. It was, in fact, offering her an opportunity to feel and remember. Yarzheit—a chance to mourn, but also a chance to heal. This chance, this experience, she thinks, will come every year. It has a purpose. Its rhythm is circular, like her daughters' dancing, like the waxing of the moon.

She watches as the short wick sends sparks from the high flame into the air above, how it dances, and how it connects her to her past and her future. And she rises to greet her family and the evening's blessings. ●

Karen Paul-Stern grew up in Brooklyn and now lives in Takoma Park, MD. She is a consultant to non-profit organizations, a writer, and mother of three. This story won Lilith's annual fiction contest.

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Preparing for Yom Kippur

by Mel Patrell Furman

Panes of sunlight fall around my hands on the morning
counter as I begin the meal we will eat before fasting.
For dessert, Tante Etta's special German plum torte,
the sticky dough protesting into a pan burnt with caramel,
a dark blade halving and pitting sweet plums for the top.
At her husband's shiva years ago, she promised to teach me,
electing me plumcake heiress for the simple pleasure
of disinheriting some other misbegotten in-law in training.

Tante Etta, a mountain of a Berliner, sits in my kitchen.
Voice guttural with the smoke of thousands of cigarettes,
accent undiminished through thirty years of exile,
Her suffering, her kindness feeding scraps to children locked
in joyless Berlin, her hard-earned spite. She swears like a sailor
Or a woman left barren by circumstance.

As if Etta's large and heavy soul
Has left a tear in the membrane that separates them,
The dead begin to drift into my home, as various
as snowflakes but not evanescent; they accumulate.
Their silenced voices bid us to speak words of joy
Their dessicated hands and empty kitchens beg us to bake.
When it is time to dress for dinner
I stagger upstairs under a foggy blanket of lead.

As I stand at my dresser, their jewelry cries out to me.
My grandmother's aquamarine earrings, which she swore
had held diamonds until the family ran out of food.
The sapphire bracelet I cannot latch myself
Reminds me of helping Nonna dress for Poppy's funeral,
Putting on her necklace, zipping up her dress.
Aunt Rita's bracelet, long promised to me, weighs
Down my arms with chiming charms whose meanings I forget.

A cardinal sings in the still-green leaves, hoping for his mate.
Left in the drawer is my mother-in-law's gold bangle,
Still strange to me. One day my daughter will wear it,
Standing tall, her shoulders braced against the weight
of all her gold, the plum cake recipe strung around her neck
like a dog tag, a yellow star, or a badge of honor.

Mel Patrell Furman is a Jew by choice and a member of the Jewish Reconstructionist Congregation of Evanston, Illinois. She studied poetry writing at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and the University of Iowa Summer Writers Festival.

Landlord to such a Multitude

How fair are your tents, O Jacob?
Your dwelling places, O Israel? (Numbers 24:5)

by Sue Swartz

Sue Swartz teaches diversity and social change at Indiana University, leads Jewish prayer & ritual, runs a well-oiled household, and writes poetry.

(Inside me, a house.)

In my house,
King David plucks his lonesome harp
& Queen Esther prances in royal robes.
The newly freed burst into song.
A young man in long black coat shuckles
while another young man cradles a spent Uzi,
and Emma Goldman gathers up crumbs
of manna in my house. Sallow-eyed survivors
sit silently with their accusations while Jews-
turned-other sit silently with their demands.
In my house, women pass Friday's hands
over flame, cover their ankles with modesty.
So too, in my house, women *leyn* Torah
no matter the day of the month. Here live
socialists and secularists, *ba'alei teshuvah*
and undecideds. Russians crowd into rooms
jumbled with Ethiopians, Moroccans, Americans.
Chickpeas and olives are hoarded,
some pieces of matzah, a bowl of borscht.
The dying are everywhere: from pogrom
and heavenly plague, starvation, loneliness,
and home-made bomb. In my house,
elders exhort the young to never forget.
The radio blasts Hatikvah and Barbra
(even her Christmas album). Einstein
polishes his calculation, while Baruch Goldstein
his retribution. Screaming children spin
dreidels and old women play Mah Jongg.
Peaceniks argue it out with settlers.
The furniture gets rearranged daily in my house.
Walls change hue on whim. Strangers dance
together at midnight with outstretched arms
and tussle at dawn with mighty fists.

(Inside me, a house.
Inside the house, bickering boarders.
Inside the house, rent always coming due).

Charlotte Newberger

Charlotte Newberger's support for poetry in Lilith magazine has made possible an expanded number of pages for new poems and reviews of poetry, and this—the first annual Charlotte Newberger Poetry Prize. Charlotte has had a longstanding interest in poetry, and the arts in general. In Chicago, she has been a board member at the inception of several theatres, including the St. Nicholas and National Jewish Theatre, where she was president, and she sat for nearly 20 years on the board of the award-winning Steppenwolf Theatre, as well as The Poetry Center. She currently serves as president of the National Foundation for Jewish Culture.

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Charlotte Newberger Poetry Contest — Third Place

Things My Mother Gave Me

by Jennifer Bloustine

I wrote this with a bright green
plastic Frankenstein pen
my mom sent me from Texas.
She would call it a tchotchke,
a nothing
a cheap little piece of mass-produced junk
picked out of the 99 cent bin at McFrugal's.
A stripe of orange shirt, a flat black head
a goofy buck-toothed smile.
This is Frankenstein made nice
clean and safe for the costumed children of America's middle class.

This is the way my mother loves me from afar.
She reaches out of her loneliness to send me little candles
shaped like Pilgrims and pumpkins,
rainbow slinkies,
little grinning cats dressed like Puritans,
presiding over miniature tombstones.
My mother,
who knows something about ghosts
and the dead of the night,
who keeps company with her memories
through sleepless hours,
sends me the sanitized stuff
America buys to stave off our nightmares.

My mother,
who always wanted me to lose weight,
sends me honey cake and cookies,
star-shaped pasta and Passover candy.
Like many Jewish mothers before her,
she tries to love me with food when words fail.
The cookies arrive shattered into crumbs.
Someone else made the honey cake.
I never cooked the pasta.
But she remembers that I like the fruit slices,
and I don't like macaroons.

Honorable Mention

Rebecca Operhall
Sarah Stern

Jennifer Bloustine lives in Guatemala.

Israel
a birthright diary

by Miriam Stone

On returning from Israel, I find myself committed to stand firmly...**exactly where I had been before**

Deciding to go on a "birthright Israel" trip was like coming out to my friends. "I know you're not like that, but what about the other people on the trip?" was the general response. "Like that": Israeli flag-bearing protesters on our campus walk, shouting at the pro-Palestinian groups across the way. Like that: the yarmulka'd boys in the front of the class on "Israeli-Palestinian Politics and Society," hands shooting up to interrupt the Arab professor at every possible opportunity. Like that: the pro-Israel groups who hung up pictures of maimed Israeli children as justification for Sharon's newest military offensive.

Meanwhile, as an anthropology major reading Said and Fanon, I couldn't help but apply the concepts I was learning to the situation I saw in front of me. Wasn't Israel an outpost of the "West" in the "East"? Didn't it mirror, in some ways, the colonial oppressor?

But still, here I was actively deciding to go on a trip famous for its "pro-Israel indoctrination." I wondered if, by going, I was being true to myself and my beliefs. Did I want to go on a program sponsored by the Israeli government? Could I stand up to the reactionary politics I would surely face? And, most of all, would I be able to survive a...group tour?

But in the end it was curiosity that won me over, along with the free ticket. The truth was that I wasn't sure what my beliefs were, which side of campus walk I belonged on. I had always believed in Israel's right to exist, but wondered if it has won its existence in the wrong way. So where did that leave me? I went to Israel not only to explore my Jewish identity, but to also to understand better my political identity as a Jew.

Day 1

We hit the ground running at 9 AM after the overnight flight. I was glad I had taken a sleeping pill and gotten a few hours of airplane sleep. My boyfriend, Josh, and I had barely spoken to anyone so far; in fact, I found myself pulling inward with an adolescent nervousness, probably because I hadn't been shuttled around with a group so large since middle school. We headed first to Neot Kedumim, a biblical garden with plants and harvesting tools from ancient times. After lunch (kosher and slightly soggy) we sat in a circle and met the other people in our group. I was surprised that many of the 40 people on our bus had been to Israel before—some were even born there—but hadn't been on an organized,

I went to Israel not only **to explore my Jewish identity,** but to also to **understand better my political identity** as a Jew.

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Instead of the **hard-core, militant stance I expected,** I found a very open, **knowledgeable person** who was willing to sit with me.

educational trip, which would have disqualified them from this one. There were people from all parts of the U.S.: A girl with spiky red hair just entering college in Florida, a med student who would turn 27 in a few days (26 is the maximum age for the trip), along with a bike mechanic, an art teacher, a legal analyst and a metal sculptor.

Much to my surprise, no one said they had come on the trip to "support Israel" or revealed anything remotely political; most people admitted they signed up because, well, it was free. Then it suddenly dawned on me: the flag wavers from

Most people admitted they signed up because, well, **it was free.**

campus walk and the outspoken boys in my poli sci class had probably already been to Israel on organized trips. We were the unconverted, the ones who hadn't yet made Israel a focus of our lives. We were birthright's target audience.

After that I felt relieved—these were just normal, everyday 20somethings lured by a free trip to a faraway land. Still, no one in the circle besides me had said anything about wanting to learn more about the political situation, to view firsthand what the struggle is really all about. I decided to let down my guard a little and see what the trip might bring.

Day 3

So…very…tired. Sleep (except on the bus, between stops) had become a luxury, along with calling home to the U.S. and having clean hair. I'd learned an unbelievable amount in the span of just a few days. Every sight we stopped at—the old city in Jerusalem, the synagogue in Tsfat, even the cities we saw out of the bus window on our drive North—brimmed with history. Our guide, Amir, was a walking Israeli encyclopedia. I felt lucky to have such a knowledgeable person to show me the country.

But for all we were learning about history, culture and religion, the first political topic we broached happened the night before, and it was only because Josh decided to break the ice. We were having a group discussion with seven Israeli soldiers who would be joining us for the next few days. After making the rounds of surface-level questions like, how long is your army service, what do you do in the army, what kinds of jobs do women have, Josh raised his hand and asked the soldiers how their lives are affected by being so close to violence and basically living in a war zone. They all answered very openly, and the conversation soon turned from violence to the subject of people who get out of the army in some way, either by claiming to have a mental disability or because they are conscientious objectors ("refuseniks").

The soldiers, as well as many of my traveling companions, expressed negative reactions. Naively, I suppose, I was shocked. Refuseniks are the heroes of progressive Jews in the U.S. Yet here was a roomful of people, my guide included, who did not respect that choice. Amir ended the discussion with a note on how we birthright participants were becoming armed to go home and defend Israel against all the "pro-Palestinians" out there. I thought: You mean my friends? To Amir, "pro-Palestinian" was synonymous with "Anti-Israel," as if it wasn't possible to believe in the right of both groups to have a homeland or a state. I was very disturbed, but decided that I would keep my mouth shut and just vent to Josh behind closed doors.

But the next day I got up the nerve to walk down the aisle of the bus and talk to Amir directly. I asked him again about the refuseniks, and he told me his opinion in a much more nuanced way than he had in front of the group. We continued talking, and instead of the hard-core, militant stance I expected, I found a very open, knowledgeable person who was willing to sit with me for what must have been 45 minutes and discuss the issues I wanted to know about.

It seemed that the more facts you have **the more complex the situation becomes.** Amir rejected seeing things in black and white. And I started to really enjoy **thinking within the gray area.**

He was certainly armed with more facts than I, but he listened to my opinions. And though I didn't agree with his analysis of all the facts, I was thrilled to find the kind of discussion I had been craving. I went back to my seat feeling relief. I wouldn't have to spend the next seven days stifling my opinions and feelings. And I had found someone to whom I could pose the really tough questions; that was why I was there, after all.

And what about **the security fence,** which almost every Israeli I met believed, **rightly or not, is helping to keep them safe?**

Day 5

Shabbat. Finally. I'd never appreciated the day of rest more. I slept till (gasp) 10 AM, missed breakfast, and read my Amy Tan book over coffee in Kibbutz Hagoshrim's courtyard. A group of us got together to do yoga on the grass in the late afternoon. A relaxing day.

The night before, Josh and I had taken a bottle of wine and met up with Amir. We asked him a lot of the questions we'd been saving up: Did Camp David really offer a good deal to the Palestinians? What ever happened to the Geneva Accords? Why is there less dialogue now between Israelis and Palestinians than there was even a few years ago? His answers didn't always please me, but I found, over and over, that there was no simple answer to any question. In fact, it seemed that the more facts you have the more complex the situation becomes. Amir rejected seeing things in black and white. And I started to really enjoy thinking within the gray area.

Soon, others joined our conversation. I guess they, too, were looking for something more than the drinking games going on at the other side of the yard. At first I was pleased, but I soon became frustrated. The newcomers started saying things like "There is no possibility of a fair peace treaty with any Arab nation" and "Barak offered everything to the Palestinians at Camp David." Amir, calmly and eloquently, responded with his arsenal of facts, such as, "We have a peace treaty with Egypt." And, "Actually nothing was officially offered at Camp David. Barak and Arafat never even spoke face to face, and having Arafat back out was quite convenient to both sides involved." But still, the black-and-white, unnuanced questions continued. Josh and I finally had to leave the conversation, giving Amir the rest of our bottle of wine—he'd need it more than we would.

Day 8

We went to Rabin Square, where I found myself more moved than anywhere we'd been so far. I felt an enormous sense of loss. The unraveling of hope was palpable. Amir stood in front of the memorial and asked us, his voice shaking, "Where is the next Rabin?"

Rabin Square in Tel Aviv shows that this situation can never be pared down to us *vs.* them or right *vs.* wrong. One of the people who actually had a chance at bringing peace to the region was killed by an extremist—and not a Palestinian one, but an Israeli. There are countless examples of how complex every issue is in Israel. For example, can you make the blanket statement that "Israel" is the oppressor, when polls show that about 70 percent of its citizens don't support the occupation? And what about the security fence, which almost every Israeli I met believed, rightly or not, is helping to keep them safe? Or what about the question of the Jewish "character" of the state, when Arab Israelis may one day become a majority? None of these are simple questions, so none deserve simple answers. I lingered in the square long after the rest of the group started walking to the bus. I knew the memory of this place would stay with me back in the U.S.

Reflections

I was afraid of coming back "pro-Israel." Instead, I've found that that's what I've been all along. But to me, that's never going to mean waving a flag on campus or immediately going on the defensive when the topic of Israel comes up. To me, supporting Israel means committing myself to listening more,

I was **afraid of coming back "pro-Israel,"** but instead I've found that **that's what I've been all along.**

to discussing more, to rejecting simple answers or black-and-white statements. Our guide said to me one night that birthright participants, who by their very nature are just beginning to understand their ties to Israel, aren't ready to really address the political situation in a formal way. I very much disagree with that. What better time for people to begin to analyze, discuss and understand the situation than while they are in Israel, experiencing for themselves why this land is so important to so many people? I think the reason birthright has a reputation for indoctrination is because real discussion is not at present part of the program. I shouldn't have had to corner my guide in order to ask the questions most important to me. I believe that encouraging discussion and debate, besides being a fundamental part of Judaism, will only help in the pursuit of understanding, peace and the flourishing of the Israeli state.

Miriam Stone is the author of At The End of Words: A Daughter's Memoir (Candlewick, 2004). She lives in Brooklyn and is completing a novel.

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Another Kind of Israel Diary 1959-2004

by Helen Schary Motro

Almost every April 17, I tally up my private anniversary. The toll has reached almost half a century since I first set eyes upon the Promised Land. I was no refugee. I have never kissed the ground upon arriving. But for me, too, there is always something akin to being borne there, as the Bible says, upon the wings of eagles. The Israel I first met had so much promise. Has it fulfilled the half of it? Have I?

The prop jet left Idlewild Airport in New York carrying my parents and me on our two-week visit. A precocious fifth grader, I had been given a travel diary, in which I dutifully recorded our itinerary. Today, hardly touched since, leather cover crumbling, it stands upon my bookshelf. I open to the first entry: "Date: April 17, 1959. Place: Middle of the Atlantic Ocean. Weather: Fair. Today we started our trip to Isreal! [The 10-year-old's misspelling is mine.]

"I couldn't fall asleep tonight because of the plane's noise and the light in many berths." I didn't set down all I recall: that my mother would not permit me turn to on my overhead light, insisting I try to sleep. Still, I ended the page: "Many stars are out tonight."

That crossing took a painful 18 hours, but my first welcome to the Holy Land was striking nonetheless—we walked into the warm night blanketed by the sweet scent of orange blossoms overpowering in the limpid air. It's the closest I've come to paradise, before or since.

My mother's brother awaited us behind the gate, a bouquet of wilted carnations in his hand. He and my mother had not seen each other for 12 years, when they separated in Europe after the war—she to travel to her new life in the United States, and he to set out for his in Palestine. Arriving in the brand-new state in 1948, he went straight into the navy to help fight the War of Independence.

That same night, through bleary-eyed from jet lag, a reception awaited us by *landsmen* from my father's European town of Brest Litovsk, those lucky few who had left for Palestine before the apocalypse, which saw close to 100 percent of the town's inhabitants shot to death in a forest in October 1942.

At long last we reached little Hotel Armon on Tel Aviv's Hayarkon Street, which the all in one concierge/reception clerk/breakfast waiter proudly told me meant "palace."

Since then I have lost count of the times I have made that too-long journey across the globe. I traveled again at 17 to spend the summer working in the laboratory with my botanist uncle, and fell head-over-heels in love with the exuberant young country. Later, I flew there with beating heart to rejoin a boyfriend. And in my 20s I arrived with my Israeli husband-to-be to celebrate our marriage there. I've flown with a toddler beside me and a newborn infant on my lap, waiting a cramped eternity until they dropped off to sleep. I've traveled with my children of all ages, retrieving their crayons from between the seats, playing Old Maid, combing Barbies' hair. I traveled on her last transatlantic journey with my aged mother in a wheel chair, helping to lower her into the seat. Total luxury seemed when I could become a passenger with nothing to worry about but my own boarding pass.

The captain announces descent, and I rummage under my seat to recover my shoes, anxious to be liberated from enforced immobility.

The Holy Land at first approach does not possess guidebook beauty—neither the terraces of Katmandu nor the emerald of Dublin nor the piercing towers of Manhattan. And yet I hold my breath, and crane my neck, and peer through the scratches on the double glass to glimpse the yellow coastline I have grown to know so well.

I half wonder if, after all, the Promised Land remains a future promise, a mythical place still in the realm of myth.

The white metropolis of Tel Aviv hurtles towards me—first the ancient port of Jaffa, then white beaches where I can make out tiny people running to the surf, then its old Bauhaus buildings I know from close up are peeling plaster, and finally its steel skyscrapers multiplying too fast. We circle over what remains of the glorious orchards, above highways snaking cars, above tract housing with identical red roofs, above industrial parks and shopping malls, above fields of sunflowers and cucumbers and watermelons, above rows of dusty cypress trees, above brown-baked earth awaiting new plantings.

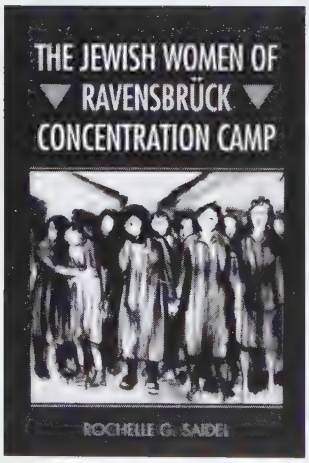
Barely five minutes after first sight, landing. I've sometimes made the journey with a heavy soul, not sure if my decision to live in Israel was right for me. Other times I made it with elation. My feelings about the beleaguered country mirrored my feelings about myself: I embraced it like a sister, or rejected it as an albatross. Sometimes I cried with sorrow, sometimes with joy.

But every time I land to rejoin my prosaic life, there is always the spark of that old excitement. Luckier than Moses, I can glimpse from afar at the Promised Land—and then enter it. What I do there, and if I make it worth the trip, is up to me. I stand by my childhood words: Many stars are out tonight.

Helen Schary Motro teaches at Tel Aviv University Law School. Her book, *Maneuvering Between the Headlines: An American Lives Through the Intifada*, is due to be published in New York by Other Books in spring 2005.

Eye on Arts & Culture

New books with very different views of Holocaust histories.



Magical Stories

Canada is home to someone whom Nobel Prize winner Elie Wiesel calls one of the best Yiddish writers today.' Wiesel is talking about **Chava Rosenfarb**, an international prizewinner for her poetry and fiction.

In her new book, ***Survivors: Seven Short Stories*** (translated from the Yiddish by Goldie Morgentaler, Cormorant Books, Toronto, 2004, $24.95) Rosenfarb's characters piece together their lives after Auschwitz in a postwar world that seems cruelly oblivious to their suffering. *Survivors*, however, also has an uplifting and almost magical quality, rare in stories that deal with such weight of memory. Many of her people embrace and explore the world around them with fascination. In regions around the world—Montréal, Paris, Latin America, Kenya—these survivors cope in very different ways in order to confront the absurdity of "normal" life after existing in the upside-down moral universe of the death camps. One woman keeps a diary obsessively to feel alive, giving herself "tangible proof that something—no matter how meaningless and insignificant that something was—had actually happened" besides her time in the camps. While dying of tuberculosis, another character takes a young lover in order to experience the erotic passion she believes is a life giving force before passing away.

Many of Rosenfarb's characters are women who, while struggling with the pain of their losses, share with their generation of women caught in the vortex of changing social values during the postwar years, an unfulfilled longing for independence.

In "A Friday in the Life of Sarah Zonabend," a day passes without any accidents. This is miraculous for Sarah, whose existence is fraught with anxiety about further tragedy. In "François," Leah retreats into a fantasy world with an imaginary lover to resist her husband's contrived attempts to revitalize their relationship. While the couple shares the bond of being "two orphans facing an alien world" after liberation from the camps, they are as disappointed in and absorbed with each other, as any other couple in a failing marriage.

To relieve the emotional pain of losing her baby in the camps, Manya in "The Little Red Bird" daydreams about kidnapping a newborn from a maternity ward. While on flight to Mexico to evade the authorities in her kidnapping-dream sequence, she finds herself amidst the ruins of an ancient Mayan kingdom and its altars for human sacrifice. It is here that the heroine grapples with the extent of human loss and the burden of being one who has survived. "To search for peace is futile. There is no choice," she reflects, "but to continue living in the shadows of these altars."

The "poisonous, impossible friendship" of the two women in "Edgia's Revenge" lasts for decades into mid-life after an incident in concentration camp bonds. Rella, a former sadistic *kapo*, is finally confronted by Edgia, a survivor who remembers how Rella brutalized other inmates to assure her own survival. By doing so, Edgia frees both women from one another forever.

For Rosenfarb, who is a Holocaust survivor herself, writing in Yiddish is an act of fidelity to a vanished language, as if to prove that Nazism did not succeed in extinguishing that language's last breath. If writing in Yiddish is Rosenfarb's way to defy the death of the language, then the characters in her new collection also defy being silenced when they reattach themselves to life, despite the shadows of Auschwitz which are always one step behind them.

The vibrancy of the Yiddish language used to describe the fragmented lives of Rosenfarb's characters is evident in the strength of the translation by Goldie Morgentaler. That a translation has been published so quickly is fortunate, because the volume comprises a rich and deeply moving body of fiction about the Holocaust.

—Deborah Ostrovsky Osmond

The Concentration Camp for Women

In 1980, researcher **Rochelle G. Saidel** made her first trip to the Ravensbruck concentration camp on the recommendation of one of Lilith's founding editors, Aviva Cantor. Designed specifically for women prisoners, Ravensbruck had gone virtually unmentioned in the Holocaust literature written in English, a fact that Saidel has now corrected with the meticulously researched ***The Jewish Women of Ravensbruck Concentration Camp*** (Terrace Books).

Although Jewish women and children made up 20 percent of the approximately 130,000 prisoners in Ravensbruck, the camp was associated almost exclusively with the political dissidents detained there. At the time of Saidel's first visit, the site had become a shrine to the

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women killed for their allegiance to Communism, and made no mention of the many women who died there as Jews. The camp, Saidel explains in her epilogue, memorialized the women by country, not by religion—at least not when that religion was Judaism. The Polish Jewish women who perished in the camp were acknowledged along with the Polish Catholic victims by means of a memorial room that featured a large crucifix.

Enraged at this disparity, Saidel began to investigate both the history of the camp and the creation of the memorial. Over two decades later, she has now compiled her findings, along with interviews and photos, into a thoroughly documented testimony of the presence and brutal experiences of the Jewish women in this camp.

Among the survivors appearing in the book is Gemma LaGuardia Gluck, sister of New York Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia. Though not Jewish and born an American, the Nazis detained Gemma as a "special prisoner," held suspect for her connection to Fiorello and for her marriage to a Hungarian Jew who was later killed by the Nazis. Saidel offers a cogent synthesis of existing information on the LaGuardias, but as in other chapters, her focus is more on the chronology of events than what they reveal about Gemma or Fiorello as people, or about the particular nature of Ravensbruck as a concentration camp for women.

Most of the insights Saidel does include are in regard to the memorial and how it has slowly changed to reflect the camp's figurative relocation to the west. In her conclusion, she states: It is not difficult to comprehend the reason that Jewish victims were previously left out, or why they are now included. The way we memorialize any event is colored by who is doing the remembering and for what purposes.

—Idra Novey

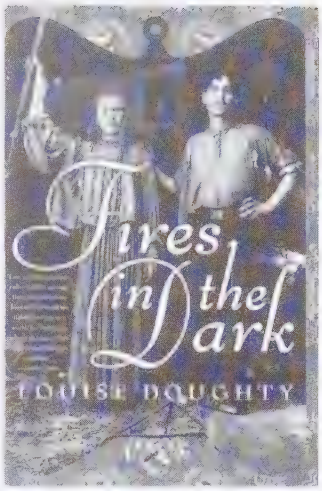
Gypsies & Jews

For all that has been published about the Holocaust, little has been written about Europe's Gypsies—the "smoke brothers" of European Jews, as one character says in this novel. First published in England, where it won a Writers Award from the Arts Council of Great Britain, ***Fires in the Dark*** (Harper Collins, $24.95) is the first in a series **Louise Doughty** has planned on the history of the Romany people and her own Roma ancestry. In this exceptional installment, she depicts the unrelenting tragedies that beset a family of Coppersmith Gypsies in Nazi-occupied Czechoslovakia. From the relatively peaceful interwar years through the Prague uprising of 1945, Doughty conveys the family's prolonged struggle to save each other and themselves.

Doughty weaves the historical context into the narrative in such a way that it doesn't overly determine the behavior of her characters. The figures inhabiting this novel are convincingly and complexly human, distracted by rivalries, desires, and the constant negotiation required for life among the gadje, the Romany term for anyone who is not-Roma.

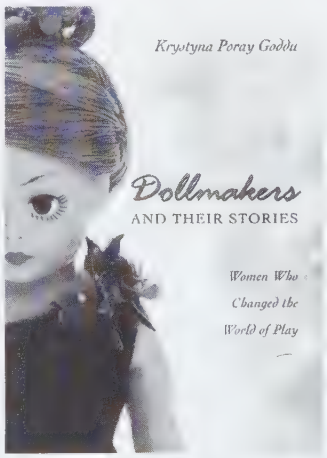
Yenko comes of age in the Hodonin labor camp, where many Moravian and Bohemian Gypsies were detained. Torn between assisting his ill parents and his weakening siblings, Yenko longs for those moments when he can speak to the lively Romany girl with whom he once fed the pigs behind the camp, or the resourceful Jewish doctor who attended to his broken jaw. They are the only two people, Yenko concludes, that seemed to believe the rest of the world still existed. Not like his own family, who were dying, sick, taking bread from his mouth—who had forgotten his name. In her compassionate portrayal of Yenko's interior life, Doughty resurrects that name and many others in this artful and significant novel.

—I.N.



Doll That's More Than a Toy

Krystyna Poray Goddu, a writer and editor specializing in toys, gives us succinct but satisfying chapters outlining the lives of several preeminent doll makers in ***Dollmakers And Their Stories: Women Who Changed The World Of Play*** (Henry Holt and Company, 2004, $17.95). Of particular note is Bertha Alexander Behrman (1895-1990) eldest daughter of Russian Jewish immigrants who settled on the Lower East Side of Manhattan and ran the country's first doll hospital. Bertha—she changed her name to Beatrice and then added Madame to further gussy it up—recalled the wealthy yet tearful girls who frequented her parents' shop with their broken dolls. Although only 12, she vowed she would one day create an unbreakable doll. The advent of WWI gave her the chance: suddenly, the German dolls and parts that were the mainstay of the business became unavailable. Alexander, by then a young married woman, saw a way to make dolls that were both unbreakable and not dependent on foreign materials. The result, a Red Cross nurse doll, was an



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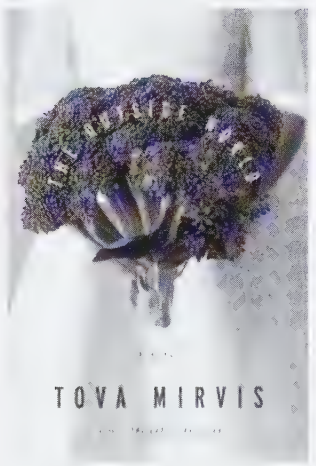

Tenderhearted rebellion in a pair of Orthodox families

instant success and the start of the legendary Madame Alexander Doll Company, still in operation today.

In this book Alexander emerges as a feisty, independent woman whose belief in the importance of play was nothing short of profound: Dolls are not a luxury. They are necessary to a child's life as a loaf of bread. What a doll does for a little girl is develop her capacity to love others and herself.

—Yona Zeldis McDonough

Families Can Change, Too

In many ways, *The Outside World* by **Tova Mirvis** (Knopf, $24) reads as a classic coming-of-age story—but with an important twist. Usually the adolescent protagonist discovers, completely on his or her own, that the world is more complicated than it had seemed in childhood. (Think Holden Caulfield, or Huck Finn.) However, as Mirvis' novel reminds us, this painful journey from youth to maturity is seldom traveled alone. Mirvis' main characters, both raised in Orthodox Jewish communities, grow into adulthood in their close—and very different—families. The choices they make affect all of the people who care about them most intimately.

The Outside World traces the romance and marriage of Tzippy Goldman and Baruch (formerly Bryan) Newberg. Tzippy, part of an ultra-Orthodox Jewish community in Monsey, New York, feels choked by the intense social pressures of her upbringing. For Tzippy, marriage becomes a way to escape the demands of her family and her community: the *baal-tshuva* mother and the little sisters focusing on her wedding as the only serious life goal, the manic father moving from one sketchy business scheme to another, the hypocrisy of neighbors watching for the slightest slip.

Bryan Newberg feels choked too, but in precisely the opposite way. His community, Modern Orthodox in a New Jersey suburb, is too secular for Bryan's growing religious devotion. He attended "Jewish day schools that doubled as feeders for the Ivy League" and "played on basketball teams wearing blue and white uniforms with matching yarmelkas." After spending two years in Israel after high school, Bryan decides that Modern Orthodoxy feels like a system of laxity and hypocrisy that would prevent him from living a truly Jewish life. Marriage becomes Baruch's way to avoid the Ivy League university education that his parents so desperately want for him.

The young people find each other in Jerusalem. After they marry, Baruch and Tzippy move to Memphis, the better to run the kosher deli (in a traif supermarket) that is the latest get-rich-quick scheme of Tzippy's dad. Tzippy decides to go to college, flourishes on campus, and warms to the heterodox Jewish community. Baruch puts his Talmudic training to practical use at the deli's kosher take-out restaurant.

Tzippy and Baruch make decisions that force their family members to re-examine their own life choices, and Mirvis masterfully captures their conflicts. Intriguingly, the tensions and subsequent personal growth play out not only in the lives of the young couple but also—especially—in the choices the women in their families make. Baruch's deepening religiosity leads his artsy mother, Naomi, to search for a more authentic spirituality; she finds it in neo-Hasidic, Jewish-Renewal style meditation circles and healing workshops. Baruch's spirited younger sister Ilana, angered by her brother's choices, begins to doubt the value of Judaism altogether. She lashes out at the rabbis at her high school who offer her unsatisfying apologies for Jewish gender inequalities. ("It's all just bullshit, isn't it?" Ilana blurts out in the middle of class.) Shayna, Tzippy's mother, is also left reeling from her daughter's unconventional choices. Feeling rejected and embarrassed by her daughter's independence, she falls into a deep depression. Under cover of this depression, she feels free at last from the constraints of running a perfect household.

If *Outside World* has a flaw, it is that Mirvis does not fill out every one of her characters with equal complexity and care. Tzippy's four sisters, for instance, remain undifferentiated shadows. But Mirvis' spot-on portraits of community dynamics easily make up for these gaps; her description of the pushes and pulls of Modern Orthodox Jewish life is especially compelling.

Deftly, Tova Mirvis recounts more than the tale of an adolescent learning to make independent choices. Instead, this warm and sometimes comic book tells the story of entire families which, along with their newly married son and daughter, must also come of age.

—Rachel Kranson

Our Reviewers

Patty Grossman has a new novel, *Brian in Three Seasons*, which will be published by the Permanent Press in 2005.

Ilana Kramer is a graduate student in gender politics at New York University.

Rachel Kranson is a doctoral candidate in Jewish American history at New York University.

Idra Novey is a poet and translator, an editor for the poetry journal Rattapallax, and a teacher in Columbia's undergraduate Writing Program.

Deborah Ostrovsky Osmond lives in Montréal. Her articles have appeared in academic publications and in the Canadian newspaper The Globe and Mail. She was a finalist in the 2003 Canadian Broadcasting Corporation's Quebec Short Story Competition.

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Esther—The Unknown Sister

In an article on **Esther Singer Kreitman** in the Spring 1991 issue of Lilith, Clive Sinclair asks about the sister of famous writers I.B. and I.J. Singer, "Why do so few of us even know her name? Why is her work either lost or out of print?" Thanks to The Feminist Press, this question will now be moot. It has just reissued a beautiful edition of Kreitman's pivotal semi-autobiographical novel ***Deborah***, originally published in 1936. This 2004 book ($24.95) features a translation from the Yiddish by Maurice Carr, an introduction by Ilan Stavans and an afterword by Anita Norich.

Deborah documents the struggle of one family of Polish Jews in the years just prior to World War I. The forces working against them, and against Deborah in particular, are legion: poverty; moral corruption extending from their peers to their spiritual leaders; before they move to Warsaw, insulation from the world outside the shtetl; their own misogyny (institutional and internalized); and helplessness in the face of practical exigencies. In the wake of such oppression, they turn to God. "He" is invoked throughout the book, much of the time—ironically—as a patron saint who will protect the family in the absence of their own ingenuity.

The focus of the first part of the novel is on Reb Avram Ber, Deborah's father. A gifted Talmudist, the rabbi is rapturous in his studies and in his appreciation of his congregation. "His words flow sweet as wine," declare the villagers of Jelhitz. But the stipend they provide is insufficient, and the family is lured to R—, where the rabbi is promised a decent living.

Reb Avram Ber is completely unworldly. He cannot manage his affairs, cannot provide for his family, and is slow to acknowledge that, in the absence of his decisive action, they are doomed. Raizela, Deborah's mother, is an educated woman who serves as her husband's secular advisor. But even her wise counsel cannot vanquish the toothlessness society imposes on her gender, and she remains throughout the novel an embittered character.

Eventually, again on promises of a better life, the family moves to Warsaw. Deborah's brother Michael roams the streets, his increased independence fueling his innate sense of superiority. Michael spins tales of the glories of Warsaw for Deborah, who is confined to the house because she does not own a hat and mustn't venture onto the street without one. In her role as a drudge to her impoverished family's needs, Deborah begins to awaken to the grave inequities surrounding her. Once she acquires a hat, she joins the Communist Party, where she falls in love. The ideas the party espouses resonate deeply for her. In a heartbreaking episode, Deborah tries to escape her fate by becoming a seamstress, only to find she is too clumsy to master either the skill or her own destiny.

—Patty Grossman

The extraordinary true story of two remarkable women forced to make choices in a troubled time.

Ester and Ruzya

HOW MY GRANDMOTHERS SURVIVED HITLER'S WAR AND STALIN'S PEACE

By Masha Gessen

"Beautifully written and deeply felt . . . Gessen's description of the compromises people made to survive should force those of us living in a luckier era to think harder about what we mean by 'morality.'"

—Anne Applebaum,
Pulitzer Prize-winning author of *Gulag*

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Sitting at a Chinese restaurant, 33-year-old Brooklynite filmmaker **Debra Kirschner** confides, "You know, it's such an uphill battle to be 'found' as a filmmaker." So instead of waiting to be found, she decided to well…find herself. The result is her first independent feature film, "The Tollbooth" (2004). With Marla Sokoloff (from "Dude Where's My Car" and other films) and Tovah Feldshuh, it's a modern-day spin on "Fiddler on the Roof."

Set in Brooklyn and Manhattan, "Tollbooth" tells the coming-of-age story of three close sisters and the disapproval they face from their traditional Jewish parents (one dates a Catholic boy, one's a lesbian, one has a husband who's a financial flop). The film has a hilarious edge remniscent of "My Big Fat Greek Wedding" and "Kissing Jessica Stein." Says Kirschner, "I feel like I'm part of an interesting zeitgeist of filmmakers producing movies illustrating young women who don't want to reject their culture, yet feel a lot of their culture's traditions are oppressive to

women." Kirschner continues that, "In Jewish films, there is a lot of self-mocking, but also a lot of loving and embracing of culture too."

This is true of the youngest daughter Sarabeth (Sokoloff), rejecting her parent's dreams for her by dating a Catholic and becoming an artist in New York, yet painting the memories of Holocaust stories her father told her when she was a little girl. We watch the middle daughter, devoutly religious, come out as a lesbian at the Passover seder, and the tenuous rift which opens as her mother initially rejects her identity.

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Decidedly upbeat in its poking fun at a harried mother who thirsts only for a gaggle of Jewish sons-in-law and grandchildren, "The Tollbooth" asks the more critical questions as well, framing traditionalism *versus* feminism in a Jewish context. Asks Sarabeth poignantly, "What is the point of being chosen if you don't have any choices?"

Before earning her film certificate from New York University, Kirschner, a self-proclaimed liberal and feminist, was writing feminist plays and dark fairytales. Says Kirschner, "This is a very Jewish story, and each woman has a storyline where they have to reconcile traditional upbringing with modern life." Undoubtedly, it is a stellar first feature film. In the private screening I attended, the room reverberated with both laughter and tears, suggesting that Kirschner is one filmmaker who can pull at the heartstrings and at the same time keep her Jewish feminist politics in balance.

—Ilana Kramer

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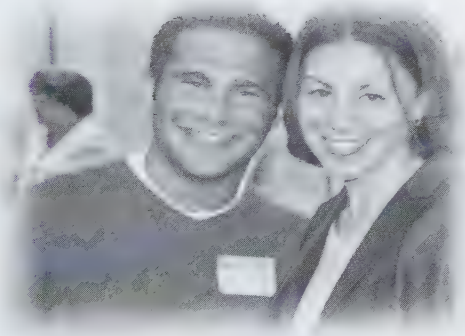

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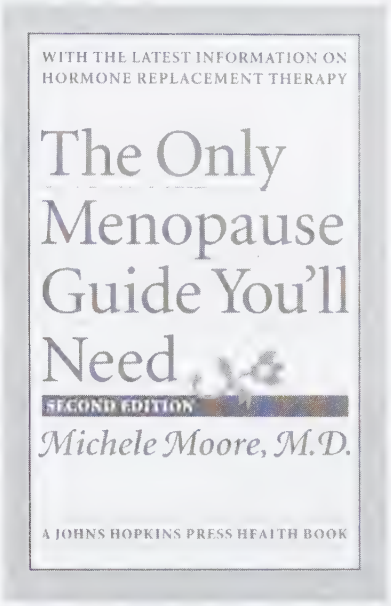
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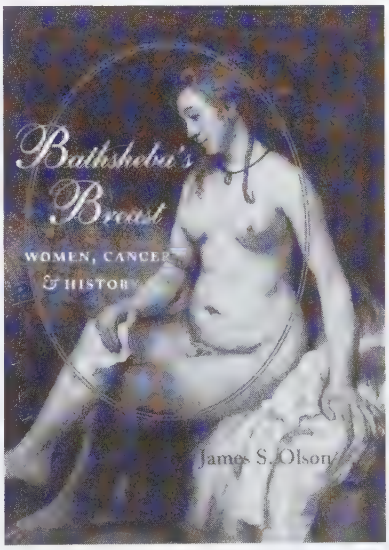

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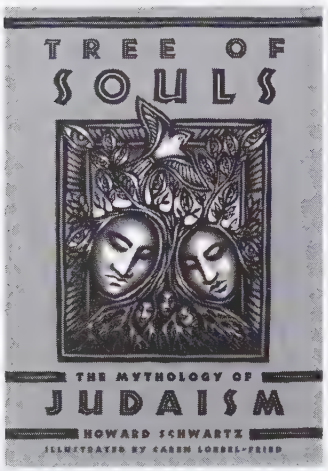
book excerpt

Joseph's Niece

The fascinating woman Serah bat Asher was not the invention of 21st-century Jewish feminists, but rather of the ancient (male) rabbis, as **Howard Schwartz** *shows us in this excerpt from his landmark volume* Tree of Souls: The Mythology of Judaism *with illustrations by* **Caren Loebel-Fried** *(Oxford University Press, 2004).*



Serah was among those who crossed the Red Sea. She lived longer than Methuselah. Readling between the lines, we learn why.

Serah was still a child when Joseph's brothers asked her to sing a little song for her grandfather, Jacob. For Joseph had sent his brothers to bring the House of Jacob to Egypt, because of the famine in the land. Then Joseph's brothers had to find a way to break the news to Jacob that Joseph was still alive. They said, "If we tell our Father that Joseph is alive, he might die from the shock." And they decided to have Serah play the harp for Jacob and sing the words "Joseph is alive." This Serah gladly did, and when Jacob, who was lost in a reverie, suddenly understood what she was saying, he cried out, "Is it true?" And when Serah assured him that it was, Jacob, in his joy, gave her a great blessing, which let her live so long....

The name Serah bat Asher appears in the Torah only twice, in two lists. Nothing else is said about her. Yet, using the midrashic method, the ancient rabbis were able to create a full identity for her and make her play an essential role in many key biblical episodes. They concluded that she lived longer than anyone else, even Methuselah. It was she who...helped Moses search for the coffin of Joseph; she who crossed the Red Sea and later reported on what the walls of the Red Sea looked like. This figure, Serah bat Asher, comes to life in the Talmud and the Midrash and becomes one of the favorite figures of the rabbis, whom they draw into the narrative as often as possible. How they did this is an object lesson in the midrashic method.

Serah is also used to resolve another apparent contradiction. Genesis 46:27 states that the total of Jacob's household who came to Egypt was 70 persons. However, those listed in Genesis 46:8-25 only total 69. The explanation given in Genesis Rabbah 94:9 is that Serah bat Asher was counted twice. Because of her extreme righteousness and wisdom, she had the value of two.

The story of Serah bat Asher begins with a name in the list in the passage describing Jacob's journey into Egypt...[then] in Numbers 26:46, the census taken by Moses in the wilderness the name Serah bat Asher appears again.... Using the midrashic method, the rabbis searched for the "right place." This is the place in the text that gives the necessary clue, making it possible to read between the lines. And in this case the clue involved another matter that is missing in the biblical narrative: how the sons of Jacob finally informed him that his beloved son, Joseph, was not dead after all....

Indeed, he was none other than the Prince of Egypt. And now that Joseph had revealed his true identity, he commanded his brothers to bring their father and the rest of the family to Egypt, for there was a famine in the land...

Reading between the lines, the rabbis intuited that the brothers were filled with guilt and remorse, as well as with fear that Jacob might die of shock when he heard the news. So they came up with the idea of letting Serah break the news to him. They asked Serah, who apparently was a child, to play the harp for Jacob and sing him a little song, with the words "Joseph is alive, Joseph is alive." Serah, of course, was glad to sing a song for her grandfather, and when Jacob realized what she was saying, he jumped up and asked, "Is it true?" And when she told him it was true, he blessed her with such a great blessing that she lived as long as she did! In this way the midrash brought Serah to life and explained how she lived for so long.

The Coffin of Joseph

Before his death, Joseph made the sons of Israel swear, saying, "When God has taken notice of you, you shall carry up my bones from here" (Gen. 50:25). So when the time came to leave Egypt, Moses searched everywhere for Joseph's coffin, but no one remembered where it was. After Moses had tired himself out searching for it, he encountered Serah bat Asher, who was a survivor of the generation of Joseph. Serah said: "My lord Moses, why are you so downcast?" Moses replied: "For three days and nights I have been searching for Joseph's coffin and I can-

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not find it." She said to him: "Come with me and I will show you where it is." Moses said: "Who are you, and how do you know where the coffin can be found?" She said: "I am Serah bat Asher, and I know for I was present when the leaden coffin of Joseph was sunk into the Nile." She led him to a shore of the Nile and there she said: "In this place the Egyptian magicians and astrologers made a metal coffin for Joseph and sank it into the river Nile, so that its waters should be blessed. Then they returned to Pharaoh and said: 'If it is your wish that these people should never leave this place, then as long as they do not find the bones of Joseph, they will be unable to leave.'"...

A Vision at the Red Sea

When Serah bat Asher was among the children of Israel at the Red Sea, she had a vision in which she saw things that none of the others saw. In the vision she saw the multitude of angels who had gathered to watch the children of Israel cross the Red Sea. So too did she see the Divine Presence, who descended among them when Miriam played the tambourine and sang the Song of the Sea. And in that vision Serah even saw the Holy One commanding the waters of the Red Sea to part. For other than Moses, Serah was the only one alive in that generation who could look upon the Holy One and live.

The Death of Serah Bat Asher

How long did Serah live? Some say she lived until the days of the Temple, while others say she lived even longer than that. One account has it that she met her death in the ninth century in a fire in a synagogue in Isfahan. And when that synagogue was rebuilt it was named the Synagogue of Serah bat Asher, and the Jews of Persia made pilgrimages to that synagogue, the holiest Jewish site in the land. Others say that Serah bat Asher never died. She was taken to the heavenly Garden of Eden while she was still alive, because she had announced to Jacob that Joseph was alive. There Serah has a palace of her own, where she teaches Torah to the righteous women. And they know that every word she says is true, because she was a witness to all the miracles that took place in those mighty days.... ●

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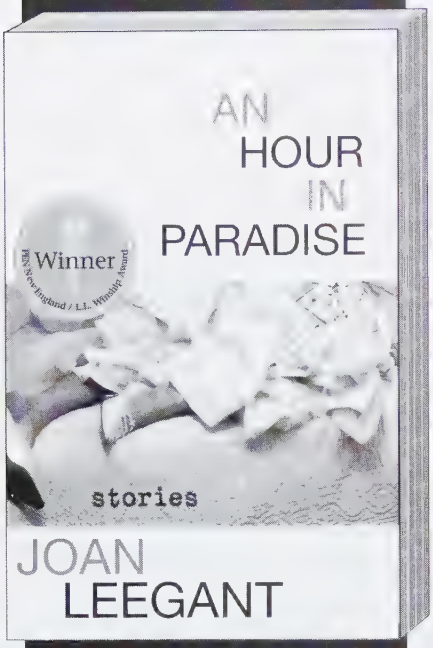

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Genetics & BREAST CANCER

continued from page 22

In the Hasidic community, there are particularly strong implications regarding fertility, privacy, and the impact on children's standing in the community. Rivi Katz, a social worker at Sharsheret, said the Orthodox women with cancer she sees skip over expressing any concern for themselves, and ask straight off, "Will it affect my kids' matches?" These women find themselves in an ethical quandary: if they find out their cancer is inherited, they have an obligation to disclose the information during matchmaking, so they feel maybe they shouldn't get tested. An additional barrier to genetic testing is the concern about their rabbis' potential disapproval not only of testing, but also of the fertility-reducing treatments that may follow.

Dealing with rabbis as middlemen (and in the Orthodox community they are all men) in medical decision-making is a

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challenge for clinicians. One rabbi wanted to speak to a doctor on behalf of a woman patient, and had to be convinced to send her to see the doctor in person. The clinicians and social workers at the symposium are working on outreach and education for rabbis, to facilitate their patients' health care. Dr. Sheldon Feldman, chief of the breast surgery division at Beth Israel, cited rabbinical writings in favor of genetic testing for Tay-Sachs, an Ashkenazi genetic disease for which a couple can now be tested in advance of marriage or pregnancy, as a precedent for future rabbinic support of testing and treatment for inherited cancer.

The current, state-of-the-art medical information about the breast cancer mutations came to light in part because of American Jewish educational values and embrace of medicine's life-saving endeavors. So our history as a culturally distinct ethnic group is the source both of the scourge of inherited cancer and of the resources to meet these hardships. In the Jewish tradition of communal obligation, all the women interviewed for this article expressed their deep commitment to helping others by telling their stories. Gayle Sobel, who herself carries the BRCA2 mutation, is scheduled for prophylactic mastectomies. Through FORCE, she has met with a group of predominantly Jewish pre-vivors in New Jersey, with whom she has found "finally a place where I fit…a sisterhood." She prepared herself for her surgery and reconstruction, in part because women in the group were able to show each other the results of different types of reconstruction.

Now she says she has "a new crusade of education" to encourage women, even if they're scared, to inform themselves. "I'm sad. I'm angry. But I'm grateful I have options. The more women know, the more we can help ourselves and support each other." ●

A webcast of the symposium will be available at the Sharsheret website (http://www.sharsheret.org) through January 28, 2005.

Shala Erlich, M.D., a writer in Seattle, concentrates on stories about health, medicine, and the experience of patients.

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Please send printed samples or slides to Art Director, LILITH, 250 West 57th St., Suite 2432, New York, NY 10107, or e-mail website links or downloadable images to info@Lilith.org

Please do not send original art, as we cannot return samples. To see back issue covers, visit us at www.Lilith.org.

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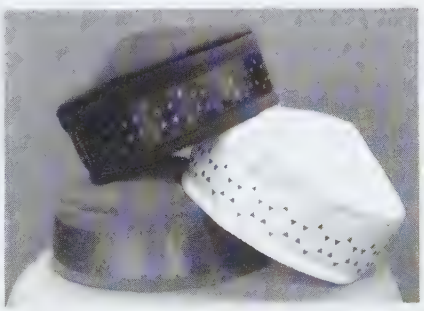


tsena rena

Where to go for **what** if you're Jewish and female.

MOBILIZE

Want to shape the Jewish world? The Professional Leaders Project will provide twenty-somethings with professional and volunteer leadership opportunities in the Jewish nonprofit sector. If you're in this age group—or a Jewish professional of any age—interested in finding out more, contact *Rhoda Weisman* at *www.jewishleaders.net*

Mean girls—*and* boys. We know that students who fail to live up to classmates' expectations of masculinity or femininity are targets for taunting and ostracism, and sometimes even violent assault. Learn how to help **combat bullying caused by gender stereotypes**. Contact the Gender Public Advocacy Coalition's Gender, *www.gpac.org*. Activists are also gathering support for federal bill H.R. 4776, making school anti-bullying policies and training procedures mandatory; *http://www.gpac.org/youth/factsheethr4776.doc*

If We Knew Then What We Know Now: A Guide to Mourning and Moving On, a new how-to book by Natalie Pelavin, longtime community volunteer and Barbara Sosnowitz, retired social work professor, offers practical advice to widows and others. It's a simple and sympathetic text, with forms and lists, for a time when a longer read would be daunting. *$12 plus $2.50 postage payable to Natalie Pelavin, and send to Lilith Magazine, 250 W. 57th St., #2432, New York, NY 10107.*

Sexual Violence Research Initiative promotes and disseminates research to reduce—and respond to—sexual violence. This includes sexual abuse and coercion of adult and adolescent women, child sexual abuse, sexual torture and violence in war situations, and trafficking in women and girls for sex. The SVRI is funded by the Global Forum for Health Research and is hosted by the World Health Organization. *www.who.int/gender/violence/sexviolresearch/en/*

HEALTH AND WELLBEING

HIV Goddesses: Stories of Courage, is journalist Sharon Sopher's film of her own story of living with the virus, the centerpiece in A Women's Wellness and Empowerment Project. Sopher's goal is to have awareness catch up to the epidemic. Women make up nearly 50 percent of all HIV cases, with girls and young women at greatest risk of contracting the disease. The project includes a photo exhibit of American women living with AIDS and a bookmark with gender-based facts. Says Sopher, who got AIDS while making a film in Africa, **"AIDS totally erases who you were and becomes the definer of who you are."** *www.cdc.gov/hiv/pubs/facts/women.htm/*

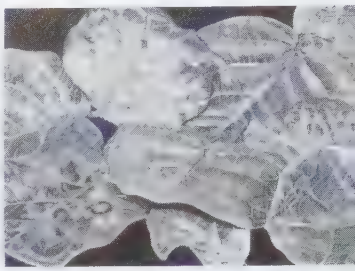
What if you're Jewish in a non-Jewish care facility? Sacred Seasons: Jewish Resources for Elders, is a series of celebration kits to help facilitate celebrating Shabbat and holidays for Jewish elders in non-Jewish residential care settings. There are people who might otherwise be completely cut off from Jewish life. The kits contain background on each holiday observance, step-by-step instruction, large-type prayers and blessings for participants, and a recording of the songs and blessings. One of several projects from Hiddur: the Center for Aging and Judaism at the Reconstructionist Rabbincal College. Director Rabbi Dayle A. Friedman notes that nearly one quarter of our Jewish community is already over 60, an urgent issue for women, who both-bear the brunt of caregiving and longer than our male counterparts. *Hiddur@rrc.edu*

About What Was Lost. For a literary anthology of writers on miscarriage, to be published by Chamberlain Brothers/Penguin, in 2006—Jessica Berger Gross is looking for nonfiction submissions 4,000-6,500 words long from women writers—and a few men as well. "Miscarriage needn't be the sole topic of the essays, but rather a fulcrum upon which the nonfiction narratives turn." Send your inquiry or essay with a short bio to *jessicabergergross@mac.com.*

ART

Seeing Ourselves explores the female psyche in portraits of women featuring the work of five Jewish women artists: Shanna Tellerman, Lois Blaufeld, Libby Fishman, Lynne Frank and Bella Baran. From January 1 to March 15, at the *American Jewish Museum of the JCC of Greater Pittsburgh, 5738 Forbes Ave., Pittsburgh, PA 15217; 412-521-8011 x105; www.ccpgh.org*

Jan Aronson: "A Reverence for Nature," offers landscapes, nature studies and



Painting by Jan Aronson.

portraits that "convey the ineffability of the familiar and the mystery of the unknown."

Leslie A. Golomb and Louise Silk "Deez Nites be All Da Same To Me" presents narrative quilts that tell the story of a slave's passage to freedom. The quilts fuse symbolic images from the Passover hagada and the Exodus from Egypt with African textiles and the Underground Railroad's coded quilt patterns that provided directions toward safe havens. Both on view February 14-June 30 at the Hebrew Union College Museum in New York *www.huc.edu/museums/ny*

The Naava Huppah. A newly created marriage canopy memorializes Naava Applebaum, who, with her father, was killed by a terrorist's bomb in Israel the day before her wedding. She had worked with pediatric oncology patients at Shaare Zedek Medical Center. A donation of $5,000 to the Naava Applebaum Sherut Leumi National Service Program at Shaare Tzedek will help continue her

work and will bring you the huppah for use at your wedding. Contact *Stephen Schechter (212)999-5585.*

JEWISH LAW

Ask a woman. *Yoatzot halakha* are women trained as halakhic consultants. They can answer questions in Hebrew or English about *Taharat Hamishpachah* (an area of Jewish Law that relates to marriage, sexuality and women's health). They're trained in Torah plus psychology, gynecology, infertility, women's health, family dynamics and sexuality. They can be reached through a web site or telephone hotline. The medical advisor is Deena Zimmerman, MD. *Nishmat's Golda Koschitzky Women's Halachic Hotline in Israel: 972-2-642-0102; toll free from the United States and Canada: 877-963-8938; www.yoatzot.org*

READ THESE

Amid Grief: Writings by Israeli Jewish Women on Peace Seeking. The 2004 issue Bridges Jewish Feminist Journal opens with **a heated exchange of letters** between Israeli poet Lois Bar-Yaacov and American poet Adrienne Rich. It contains testimony in poetry, art, essays and reviews by Terry Greenblatt, Naomi Chazan, Deborah Greniman, Shani Werner, Rela Mazali, Hannah Safran, Linda Zisquit, Shirley Kaufman, and others. $9 from *Bridges, PO Box 1206, Ann Arbor, MI 48106 www.bridgesjournal.org*

"The Eleventh Hour," a short story by Emma Lazarus, is reprinted for the first time since it's original 1878 publication in the premier issue of Maggid, a Journal of Jewish Literature, focusing this time on American Jewish writing. Included are Cynthia Ozick, Rebecca Goldstein, Alicia Ostriker, Nava Semel and others. $9.95 from Toby Press, *www.tobypress.com*

Koret Young Writer Award. One writer whose work contains Jewish themes will be awarded $25,000 and spend three months in residence at Stanford University. The winner for 2005 will be honored at the 7th annual Koret Jewish Book Awards ceremony on April 11, 2005. (Full disclosure: last year's winner was former Lilith intern Rachel Kadish.) Applicants must be 40 or younger and have published no more than one book of fiction, non-fiction or poetry. Non-U.S. residents may also apply. Scholarly work will not be considered. *www.koretfoundation.org*

WRITERS

Has your writing ever appeared in Lilith?
If so, please let us know in advance when you are making a public appearance, reading from your work, giving a lecture, etc., and we'll happily list these on our wonderful new Lilith website—Lilith.org—on our "events" page. Just give us as much lead time as possible, with details about date, time, place and the nature of the event, plus a phone number or URL for further details.

Creating something new in your community?
For possible inclusion in this column, please send details to **naomi@lilith.org,** with at least 8 weeks notice. Thanks.

Sisters of '77

BE THERE!

Sisters of '77. In November 1977, 20,000 women and men from across the U.S. came together at the first National Women's Conference in Houston, Texas, to end discrimination against women and promote their equal rights. In a one-hour documentary film by Cynthia Salzman Mondell and Allen Mondell, Betty Friedan, Gloria Steinem, Eleanor Smeal, Ann Richards and others also look back at how that weekend changed American life. Airing on PBS on March 1. *www.pbs.org/sistersof77*

I'm Glad You Asked: An Evening of Free Advice Hosted by Susan Stamberg. In the shtetl you consulted the rebbe, the matchmaker, or your mother. The New World brought new possibilities: newspapers, radio, television, the Internet. **Are redheads cursed? Will I die if I marry a woman with a dimpled chin? How do I get my parents to stop speaking Yiddish in public?** From the Bintel Brief to Dear Abby to Drs. Ruth and Laura, advice mavens have used mass media to dispense commonsense wisdom and voyeuristic entertainment. February 28, 2005, at the Washington DCJCC, and March 28, 2005, in Chicago at The Abbey Pub; *www.nextbook.org*

The Avodah Dance Ensemble recently marked the retirement of its founder Joanne Tucker. Julie Gayer, now artistic director of liturgical and educational programming, is creating a new dance repertory for Friday night services the themes of candle lighting/ candle sticks; mikvah and multicultural interpretations of water; and a poem "Enemies" by Charlotte Zolotow. The troupe is available for school visits, workshops and residencies. *www.avodahdance.org*

Women's Economy: Creativity, Work, Volunteering and Slavery. Work as empowerment or exploitation of women, and the influence of religion, ethnicity, and social class will be among the themes of a March 3 conference in Rishon LeZion, Israel, organized by Sylvia Bijaoui, Yafa Berlovitz and Frances Raday—for the *Israel Association for Feminist and Gender Studies 972-2-5340593, ibii@netvision.net.il*

—compiled by Naomi Danis

The Memory Quilts

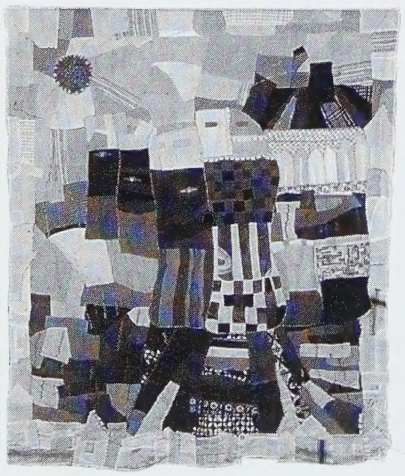
"Since my dad died I've been cutting up his clothing." Thus began my artistic statement for "Pieces of Memory," an exhibition of my fiberart pieces.

How do you heal from the loss of parents? Each of us experiences being a child who becomes an adult and finally a parentless orphan. It seems just yesterday my parents, Sadye and Howard Shapiro, and I were gossiping about the neighborhood over lunch and cooing together over our next generation at a family gathering.

I was in a state of shock when my dad died. I had just finished a master's degree, signed a divorce agreement, and was in the process of moving my adult learning disabled daughter to a new home over 500 miles away. My dad had devoted the last 10 years of his life to my mom, painfully and helplessly watching her become debilitated from Alzheimer's disease. I was able to tell him I loved him as he went in for a standard heart catherization. He never came back to consciousness. He was fortunate to die quickly and painlessly. He'd had his share of pain watching my mom.

I cleaned out their belongs twice, once to move them to an assisted living facility and then, finally, after his death. Both times, along with photos and special mementos, I selected clothing and textiles that I hoped would be quilt-worthy. Being a quilt maker, I knew about the great tradition of the remembrance quilt, created to immortalize in fabric something of significance: a person, an event, or even an insight. Creating such a quilt allows its maker a space to reflect, recall, weep, lament, sigh, smile and laugh. There are lots of different kinds of remembrance quilts: friendship quilts that mark relationships, special-occasion quilts that document events like births and weddings, and mourning quilts that mark the loss of a loved one.

One remembrance quilt is the monumental quilt fashioned by the loved ones of AIDS victims. The first time I actually saw a portion of The AIDS Quilt was on a special trip to the New York Public Library. The panels were not professionally crafted, yet each was very powerful to me, because I knew it represented a precious extinguished life. That was many years ago. Today, every conceivable material and technique have been used in this quilt: photographs, letters, even rubber flip flops and teddy bears have been lovingly incorporated. Too big to be contained in the Washington Monument Mall where it used to be shown periodically, sections now travel around the country. Its blocks represent the precious individuality of the victims, and the quilt in its entirety stands for the untimely and wretched nature of the disease, a powerful visual expression beyond words.



I was overwhelmed with the array of my parent's cloth I had carted back to my studio. Numerous cross-stitched tablecloths. All kinds of slippery knitted sweaters. Fancy formal wear. Brightly colored golf attire. Heavy Turkish towels. It took me two years to cut up their clothing. It was the only way I knew to grieve my loss. In the process I created a memorial that would have filled them with pride along with tinges of embarrassment and disbelief.

At the beginning of my mission, one picture held my attention. It showed them as a young, carefree couple strutting on the boardwalk of Atlantic City. I translated the image to a life-size pattern and began to sort the fabrics. I was dismayed. My parents appeared light and airy in the photo, and the materials I had of theirs were overwhelmingly heavy and coarse. In frustration, I covered over the life-size drawing and began a quilt more in keeping with the materials. What resulted was a child's view of my parents, complete with our house, my brother, and my

It took me two years to cut up all my parents' clothing.

father's two brothers, from whom he was inseparable. I spent uncountable days on this first quilt. Cutting into the clothing, hacking off sleeves, salvaging pockets and ripping linings. Every stitch was by hand, fueled by memories and tears. As I was adding decorative embroideries to the quilt's surface, I got that typical quiltmaker's yen to create yet another piece that would be some variation of the first. Before I knew it, I had a series worthy of a show.

I made embroideries, a linen jacket, a poncho, table runners, photo transfer books, a gambit of pieces big and small. The fabric piles were consistently unruly, requiring continual sorting, ripping and discarding. I had trouble throwing any of the precious cloth away and managed to cut the remnants into usable squares and strips to make traditional patterned bed covers, one for each of the seven grandchildren.

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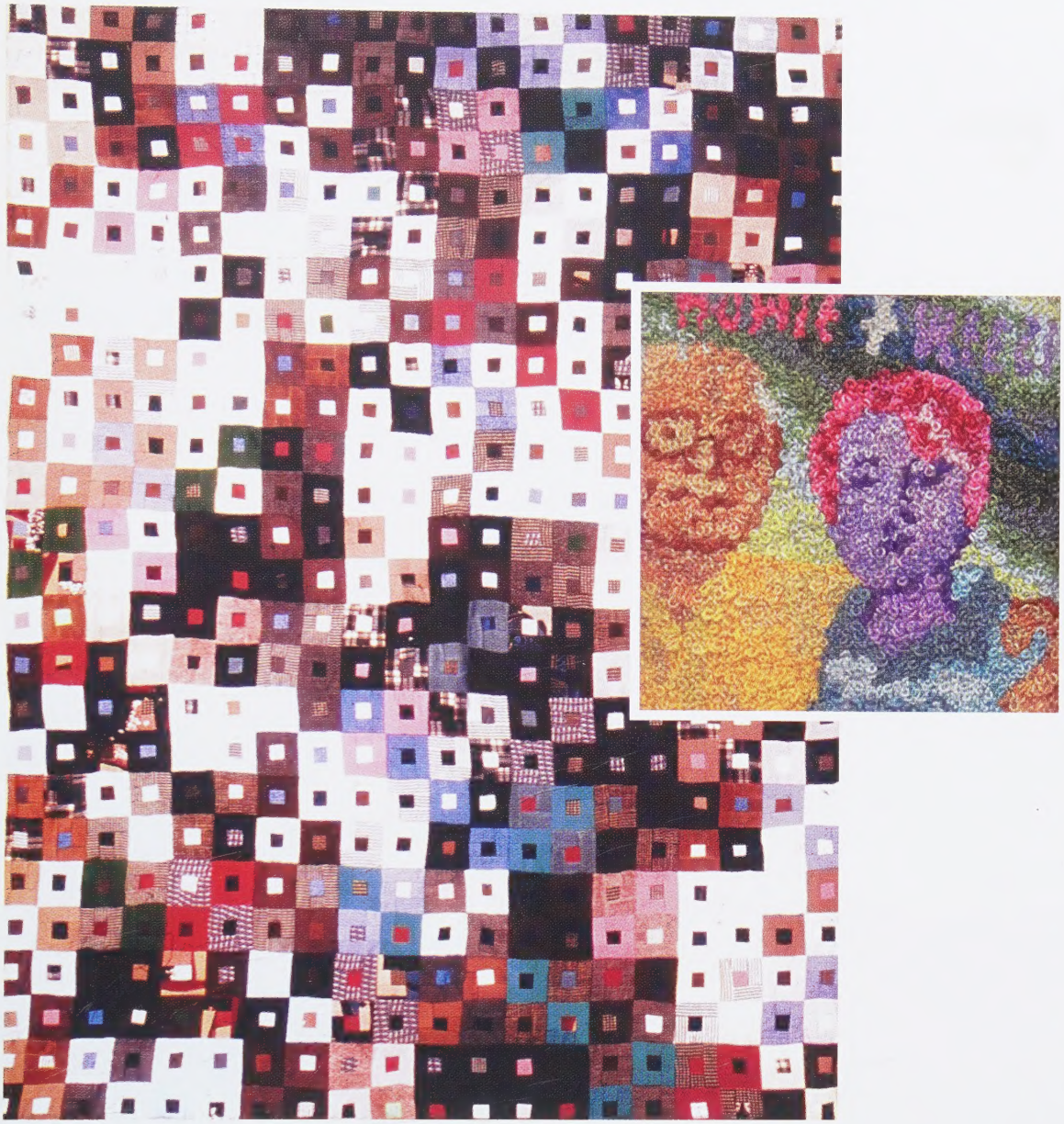
The Memory Quilt



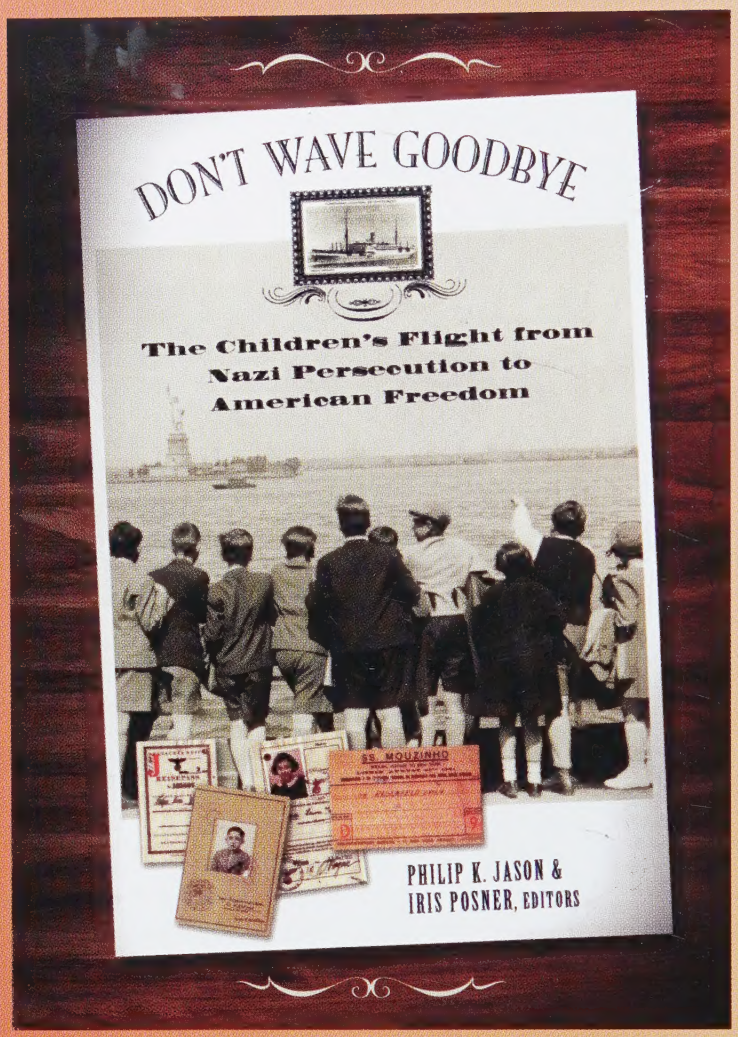
The blowup sketch of my parents on the boardwalk remained untouched on my pinup board. Other projects came and went: commissions, exhibition work, and more memory pieces. In time the solution came to me. Instead of their clothing fabric, I went to the magnificent collection of silks they had purchased for me on their travels. At my request, they had bought me several meters of both blue and red silk. I'd held onto the fabric for years; it was too precious and at the same time too difficult to use. I needed a bigger purpose for these gems. I had it, finally.

"Sadye and Howie" was the culmination of my memory-quilt grieving process. I had the quilt of my parents as I choose to remember them, light and airy, young and hopeful, and, as my mom would have said, "full of piss and vinegar."

Today, I continue to make memory quilts, but now from the memorial cloth of others. A mother gave her son a wall hanging made of Boy Scout uniforms and badges to celebrate his 30th birthday. A mother and her four daughters commissioned five king-size bed quilts from 120 dress shirts worn by their deceased father and brother. I worked with a 50-year-old and her friends in an all-day quiltmaking birthday celebration. I've made tallitot out of tee-shirts, baby quilts out of wedding dresses and quilted clothing out of European embroidery. Silk ties combine with woolen suits, formal wear unites with hand-knit sweaters and sports caps merge with baby blankets.

Each of us has a bag of memories associated with our clothing and textiles. Life's constant change leaves tangible tactile surfaces as a handy reminder. And one can never have too many quilts. ●

Louise Silk is a fabric artist in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Louise@silkquilt.com



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